BOSTON UNIVERSITY

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Thesis

AN EVALUATION OF THE FORMAL AND EMOTIONAL EFFECTS OF THE POETRY OF ROBERT BROWNING CONSIDERED FROM THE HUMANISTIC VIEWPOINT

by

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Ever since Tennyson's request of Palgrave, mentioned by the latter in his Personal Recollections, that his work should be excluded from consideration for The Golden Treasury, and the subsequent decision of the editor of that famous Collection to let the judgment of time rest upon Browning and other poets of that period, the popularity of Browning has been allowed to gather its own momentum. The modern novel and the modern spirit have found much in common with him. He is said to have charms for the mature mind when youthful enthusiasm for the Romantic poets has dimmed. A recent attempt to compile a Fifth Book comparable in standards with the other four great Books of The Golden Treasury has represented him meagerly.

Yet it has been difficult to find standards of discrimination. Browning's work departs a great deal from the ordinary modes of poetry that had gone before. And with renewed interest of Clubs and Societies gathering here and there to do him reverence and to pluck out the heart of his mystery, we presume that for some time differences of opinion may exist as to what is most worth in him. However it shall be the purpose of this paper to consider, by the truest and noblest standards to be found, the criterion of an excellence worthy to be lasting,--those poems that might best be placed among chosen others that have warmed men's Hearts for a long period of time; to determine how nearly they may fall within

Palgrave: The Golden Treasury (Crowell, Ginn, and Macmillan editions)
Carlyle: Essay on Burne

the horizon of our perception of art; and to follow as closely as possible the finest expression of these standards wherever we find them. As a basis for discussion we have drawn largely from vital observations laid down by Carlyle in his Essay on Burns, and Winchester in his Principles of Literary Criticism, together with Humanistic and Classical views as they have seemed to affect this discussion.

To apply ordinary standards of poetry to such an unordinary and unusual poet as Robert Browning, who puts whole tragedies into lyrics or brief narrative verses, who indeed brings human beings into a laboratory of environments and fates and characters; who, with a passionate devotion to the arts, sees reflected in them man's life and the world and human problems, seems a dangerous undertaking. For heretofore, Nature has been the grand agent in making poets. Yet Palgrave has observed that "Great excellence, in human art as in human character, has from the beginning of things been even more uniform than mediocrity, by virtue of the closeness of its approach to nature." To dismiss the mediocrity in Browning, and to examine from the mass of philosophy and theories and speculations, the true heart of the poet; to find finally what is human, appealing, lasting, and beautiful, is a chief and necessary task if we are to preserve the true greatness of his work. If the richest he was capable of leaving was mere philosophy or scientific interest in individuals in their environments, even

Carlyle: Essay on Burns
Palgrave: The Golden Treasury (Crowell, Ginn, and Macmillan editions)

emotionally viewed, his claim to the name of poet would be less than is here set forth. If we are truly to love him, we must seek the true artist in him.

"It is the power to appeal to the emotions that gives a book permanent interest, and consequently literary quality," says Winchester. "Let him who would move and convince others be first moved and convinced himself," says Carlyle. And this emotion must have some basis in reason; it must have the ring of sincerity; it cannot be mere whim or sentiment without being firmly founded in earnest conviction that will affect the world. And Poetry, the highest form of literature, that which contains the gems of our language, which uses the most devices to arouse our emotions; whose very form has for its pretext something higher than the ordinary in expression--poetry, more than any other kind of literature, must appeal to our emotions, and must be keener in its appeal than other forms.

This emotional quality takes many forms in poetry. Chiefly it must have underlying it, Love. "A poet without love were a physical and metaphysical impossibility," Carlyle warns us. Here again, the love must be universal in its appeal, and not mere sentimentality. It must be great enough to see clearly. It must give the poet faith in his subject, to portray it truly and to picture its significance before all else in its environment. Here, in the matter of sight and insight, perhaps the classical doctrine of Imitation best shows.

Winchester: Principles of Literary Criticism
Carlyle: Essay on Burns

Life must be truly represented, or imitated, not only as it is, but with some attempt at understanding the Ideal world, the ideal life back of it, the significance that attaches to what is seen. Yet the poet cannot put all of this on paper; it would be intolerable. "The impression which the real thing makes upon the artist," Winchester tells us. And only as that impression becomes universal, not personal in its form, can the result hope to be art. The thing seen or written about must have its appeal to us, above the pale of opinion or criticism.

Hence, force, power, fire, intensity of emotion enter in through love; imagination and suggestion attach themselves to the picture; concreteness becomes a necessity; musical language, words with cadence in them, momentary illumination, singleness of impression, or mood; hence absolute unity and coherence all are required to carry the language of emotion into the heart, to carry truths into the heart. The poet cannot make abstract theories, cannot become bound up in any absolute doctrines; he must give what he sees through the eyes of a moment's experience, not stopping to moralize about it afterward.

Yet before proceeding with a consideration of actual poems, perhaps it would be well for us to define some of the terms used in reference to them, for the purpose of more exact estimation of them. Of those terms none more complex nor confusing arises than that of

poetry itself, variously interpreted as it is often likely to be. But the word here is used almost solely to mean that high perfection of the art which answers the requirements, in form and in spirit, laid down by Carlyle and Winchester, and observed almost invariably by our admittedly great poets. For we see that much the same rules might apply to the great epic masters, and to the highest poetic form of English and Greek drama, as to the more recent and loved English Romanticists in the lyric. We shall not enter into a discussion of poetry except from this standpoint, though undoubtedly there are many interesting examples of verse form with lesser power of art, which from the purely intellectual view are stimulating, even fascinating as studies, and contain virile expression of truths. Many of them lack the sustained form or adequate poetic strength to prove more than studies, or to present whole truths in a lasting manner. In this class, where mostly whimsical or humorous bits are found, and often great thoughts or pictures unappealingly set forth, we cannot dwell without losing sight of the masterly gifts which have raised great poetry to a universal estimation of it as lasting and memorable for all time. And so we shall consider poetry merely as that which Irving defines as <u>worthy to live</u>, and to represent the art of man's most moving expression in rhythmic language.

Nor, in such a presentation, are we liable to avoid mentioning some phase of the meaning of <u>art</u>. We come to it here in dealing

with the term realism. Of course a true Realism would contain the awareness and reality of the sense-impression world and the world perceived by mental consciousness, wherein Plato has placed the only true reality. In other words, it would embody the real and its ideal significance from life's standpoint. But this higher conception of Realism seems wanting for some finer term to express it. The Realism which we here object to, and which appears from the term as used in this discussion, is that presentation of inadequate half-truths, seen in the sense of haste or futility, and stripped bare of universal meaning or appeal. Indeed what is great as art must be more than interesting, even than humanly interesting as connecting itself with life or experience. It must see life whole.

At this point Aristotle's observation as to the length of a tragedy, where the "magnitude must be such that the whole may be easily comprehended by the eye" is not amiss. Perhaps we might enlarge his thought here to mean for poetry in general, that though it must have life-likeness, it cannot be easily comprehended unless it appeals to our whole sense of the meaning of life as seen through its subject, with proper orientation amid the philosophies and the experiences we have has; with clear focus on the thing itself, on its meaning as truth, and its significance in the scheme of things. In short, it must appeal to our whole beings, and to all men as to us, taking into consideration the finest wisdom of truth

Plato: The Republic
Aristotle: Poetics

and law, fancy and experience. It is here that the qualities of love and interpretation enter in. Almost anything real might be beautiful, if in the treatment of it we felt its significance to the artist's eye, and more so especially if our own common knowledge and association could lift it to a place of significance in our own lives.

In the painting in a London Gallery, by Etty, entitled "Youth on the Prow and Pleasure at the Helm", we have a perfected sort of reality in which the appeal at the beauty of youth and morning, and love and the voyage just beginning, gives us a whole view of life,--as we have experienced it (no matter how!), as we have dreamed it might have been or could be, and as the loss of such a vision through living, suggests itself. The same effect is obtained in literature in Wordsworth's Ode on the Intimations of Immortality. Whatever realities these works contain, they probably would be said to be idealistic in treatment of experience. Yet whatever is treated in this way, whether real or not, is worthy.

Again in painting, a Village Blacksmith has proved great art for the realistic power and humility in its subject, its sense of one's having lived simply yet grandly. Here Realism has meaning. Such an effect is to be found in literature in Wordsworth's Michael, or in Keats's Eve of St. Agnes.

Or, for a third instance, still from painting, let us take

Sargent's El Jaleo, in the Gardner Museum in Boston. Here is Realism with meaning too, yet as a mere picture it would be great art without consideration of its meaning, for it has, above all, perspective, which makes it wholly real to us as if the scene were being lived before us. Such a living reality is precisely what is lacking in the literary Realism, as the term is used here. One of the chief values of art in any form is perspective, since by presenting reality convincingly, it teaches us to observe and appreciate the things in the world about us, to increase our wonder about life and our admiration for it. Perspective in realistic art means expressing not only a thing, but a relation to our presence in its midst that gives us immediate perception of it as part of our own experience.

In literature, Chaucer's Canterbury Pilgrims give this vital effect of whole reality, derived from Chaucer's wholesome, genuine view of them as people, and the setting in which they are pictured. Shakespeare's characters in general impress us with this type of genuineness and reality. The Grave-Diggers in Hamlet "have no feeling for their business, that they sing at grave-making", yet we feel that they are human, and that we have seen their whole, simple souls, and we are drawn to them, in spite of criticism, as Hamlet was. Both Shakespeare and Chaucer have presented these characters in relation to life as a whole. In each case, it is impressive, stark reality, pictured in a setting of the religious beliefs, the customs, and superstitions of its own particular day. What is wrong,

or crude,or vulgar, is seen as wrong, or crude, or vulgar. Such a Realism is one of the highest forms of art.

Yet what we call realism, and the popularized meaning which is attached to the use of the expression in this discussion, is that incomplete view of something as it is, in which the interest is merely in showing what is seen, however crude, shorn of significance, of background, and of other elements of truth necessary to a complete picture. Such mere seeing with the eye lacks mainly the quality of emotion. There is something lovable, or pathetic at least, in every human being, which, if properly understood, would give us new vision as to life. But when we must turn away from a character without love or pity, or without understanding at least, we may feel that that character is not wholly nor faithfully portrayed. We are given facts and details of a scene, often vulgar or inhuman (for such facts and details Realism seems too often to prefer), which, when viewed, are totally without meaning to us in the lives we live. Art, above all, is to be admired; else it would have little purpose or place as art. Anything that is without concrete good or beauty, or that does not fall in the realm of inspiring or enforcing virtue or admiration in us is not the greatest art, though it may be Realism. It does not have the air of having been talked over with someone, of having been lived with, or of having been understood fully or seen perfectly. It is "just something", as one might say of it, however its measurements may have been taken. And the <u>just</u>

something is scarcely worthy to be classed in the realm of that which opens our eyes to the beauties of the world.

Humanism aims to relate art to life, on the contrary: and the term Humanism, as used here, is that higher conception which embraces religion in some form, and which aims to view the whole of life with reference to what is good and reasonable, from the sum total of man's richest experience.

Into this glow of the finest poets have given us, surely then we cannot admit Up at a Villa--Down in the City, which is at best, in spite of its love of human beings, merely the whim of an Italian nobleman, who probably for the hundredth regretful moment of his unimportant life, whines "Had I but plenty of money, money enough and to spare." We will not quarrel with the universality of the sentiment, which is indeed intensely human; we will even find

Foerster: Humanism and America
Browning: Poems and Plays

something attractive about the post-office wall where the most unique of foibles in advertising and literary ambitions are displayed. The poem is interesting in parts. And we are to presume that the irregularity and unattractiveness of the language is expressive of the speaker's hatred of art and nature. Yet the nearest we can come to an emotional appreciation of the poem is a variation between disgust and amusement. The soul of the speaker in this poem is not capable of arousing emotion in us. Were there any beauty in the structure of the piece to compensate for the rather crude philosophy, there might be more reason for its being considered. But rhyme seems merely to have been a convenient vehicle for the expression of this oddity.

So with My Last Duchess, which has indeed gained great popularity as a concrete expression of philosophy. This poem is entirely more regular and pleasing in form:

> "That's my last Duchess painted on the wall,
> Looking as if she were alive. I call
> That piece a wonder now: Fra Pandolf's hands
> Worked busily a day, and there she stands."

It does contain a certain amount of emotion, as much as a cold-blooded tyrant of that type can feel. It arouses more emotion in us than is actually contained in the poem. It has unity in its situation, but not in its mood. It undoubtedly had as its purpose to surprise us into an intense tragic horror of the polished fineness and anger half-concealed, and flattery, that lies back of this

greater tragedy in a selfish character; perhaps it even intended the katharsis that Aristotle defined as being an element of tragic art, attempting to purge our emotions, through a realization of all the emotions back of the story just glimpsed. Yet the poem contains in itself none of the finer emotions; the character presented is blind with hatred and pride. It is a mockery of life, realistic to a great degree. And it is powerful in its realism. Carlyle admits that great hatred is merely a reversal of great love, growing out of great love, and therefore proper to poetry. But here, instead of consistent hatred which has any background in love, we have a dwarfed soul even incapable of great feeling, and shrouding his true emotions in a palavering about a dowry, in a vain attempt to keep up appearances, and finally in an utter disregard for either life or beauty, worshipping only power. The result is entirely unemotional; our sympathy is clouded with disgust and hatred. The work is stimulating to the thought, but it lacks appeal to the heart. The elements of great tragedy even are lacking in that the Duke has not been defeated by his own weakness.

In Porphyria's Lover we have a concrete presentation of a mere theory. The lover, finding his loved one expressing all of her noblest self in a moment of beauty in life seeks to save her soul by strangling her in that pure moment of impulsive right. We are given an emotional picture of the rainy night, the warm room

made cheerful by Porphyria's entrance, the lover's thoughts on Porphyria's failure to triumph over her wrongs toward life, and the great sincere love of Porphyria for him, first expressed on that occasion. In all of her trust and belief in him, she is strangled by means of her own hair wound about her neck, and the lover sits calmly beside the murdered one until dawn, wondering that "God has not said a word".

The poem proceeds from that moment of memory just before dawn when the scene is re-pictured. The unity is well given its final stamp or impression with the marvelling at God's silence. Yet such cold-blooded philosophy never could be poetry even by implication. The pity which one is supposed to feel for the lover is completely obliterated by the unhumanness of the deed. The philosophy is unsound and by no means universal in its reason. From the standpoint of what is human, of what is right and just, the piece is repelling. It is an example of realism carried to the extreme, of the futility of an existence based upon absolute theories. We cannot for a moment imagine that the poet is sincere in such a belief. What he meant was not to excuse the murder, but <u>if</u> a person were to die in a moment of peacefulness with life, <u>would he not be</u> forgiven? More than that he could not mean without setting himself up against all the wisdoms of the ages, without setting himself up as an absolute power back of the universe. The thing is mere theory. How then can it be poetry, which professes to be

true to life, to be sincere, to be the highest and worthiest part of our literature? It lacks any form of universality. It is merely emotional and musical, and futile. And futility least of all has a place in literature.

The same falsity to life, the same futility is given us again in the treason episode of Pippa Passes. We cannot believe that the characters themselves who impulsively act wrong to receive the blessings of right are firmly grounded in the principles of human nature. If so, they are not worth picturing, for their examples ought not to be followed, and they fail to elicit any sympathy from human beings. "A poet without love were a physical and a metaphysical impossibility."

There is more true emotion to be found in some of the poems that reject theory for true conviction and philosophy. Love is generally a powerful treatment in Browning's hands. Yet in a few of his poems he falls into mere sentiment, often sentimentality, without any universal appeal. Among the latter is to be found The Flower's Name, a part of the Garden Fancies. Here the thought is worthy and beautiful: the garden beautified by one who walks through it. It contains a number of beautiful lines, such as

> "But do not detain me now, for she lingers
> There like sunshine over the ground..."

or, "Flower, you Spaniard, look that you grow not,
Stay as you are and be loved forever!"

Carlyle: Essay on Burns
Foerster: Humanism and America
Browning: Poems and Plays
Winchester: Some Principles of Literary Criticism

or, "Where I find her not, beauties vanish;
Whither I follow her, beauties flee."

Yet it seems to be an acceptable opinion that a few beautiful lines do not make a poem. And this poem in particular lacks any sustained unity of power in its emotion. Such uneffective lines as

"She loves you, noble roses, I know",

or, "Come, bud, show me the least of her traces",

or, "Roses, ranged in a valiant row,
I will never think that she passed you by!"

belong merely to the realm of sentimentality and are not of universal interest. We are not interested in hearing the lover dote upon his loved one and wish he could remember the Spanish name she gave one of the flowers. We are scarcely convinced that we could wish to learn Spanish under similar circumstances. Perhaps the single line in the poem that deserves immortality is the "Stay as you are and be loved forever." In this line indeed is a universal power and appeal that approaches the majesty of Keats in his Grecian Urn. Yet Keats's poem would never have lived if he had trusted to one line what was actually expressed throughout a whole poem. And we doubt if this poem can live without more to appeal from in it.

Of more power is that outpouring of sentiment to Evelyn Hope. It rouses our supreme emotion in the first few lines:

"Beautiful Evelyn Hope is dead!
  Sit and watch by her side an hour.
 That is her book-shelf, this her bed;
  She plucked that piece of geranium-flower."

Yet immediately after the first stanza, the poet plunges into an unnecessary account of the ages of Evelyn and himself, of how any love affair between them might have looked to the world, of belief that God will bring them together eventually, no matter how many lives each may have to live. These things expressed in the second, third, and fourth stanzas, are mere unemotional explanation, unworthy in tone of what has gone before and of what follows, for the same ideas expressed in them are given more forcibly in the stanzas following. The fourth stanza, with its

"Delayed it may be for more lives yet,
  Through worlds I shall traverse, not a few",

is much stronger than the two preceding stanzas, because less explanatory, though it belongs with them, not so much in the sentimental picture presented as in paving the way for the strong earnest conviction beginning in stanza five:

"But the time will come,--at last it will,
  When, Evelyn Hope, what meant (I shall say)
 In the lower earth, in the years long still,
  That body and soul so pure and gay?
 Why your hair was amber, I shall divine,
  And your mouth of your own geranium's red."

And again, the unity in the poem is weakened by the arrangement of stanzas. The last stanza should have come second to give the key-note of the poem. By such an arrangement, the moralizing tone

that closes the sixth stanza would have been lost, and the words "What is the issue? let us see!" might have regained the full beauty that is in them. Let us try the poem in such an arrangement.

"Beautiful Evelyn Hope is dead!
 Sit and watch by her side an hour.
That is her book-shelf, this her bed;
 She plucked that piece of geranium-flower,
Beginning to die too, in the glass;
 Little has yet been changed, I think:
The shutters are shut, no light may pass
 Save two long rays through the hinge's chink.

"I loved you, Evelyn, all the while!
 My heart seemed full as it could hold:
There was place and to spare for the frank young smile,
 And the red young mouth, and the hair's young gold.
So, hush,--I will give you this leaf to keep:
 See, I shut it inside the sweet cold hand!
There, that is our secret· go to sleep!
 You will wake and remember and understand.

"But the time will come,--at last it will,
 When, Evelyn Hope, what meant (I shall say)
In the lower earth, in the years long still,
 That body and soul so pure and gay?
Why your hair was amber, I shall divine,
 And your mouth of your own geranium's red--
And what you would do with me, in fine,
 In the new life come in the old one's stead.

"I have lived (I shall say) so much since then,
 Given up myself so many times,
Gained me the gains of various men,
 Ransacked the ages, spoiled the climes;
Yet one thing, one, in my soul's full scope,
 Either I missed, or itself missed me:
And I want and find you, Evelyn Hope!
 What is the issue? Let us see!"

Here, the arrangement makes for greater unity, for the thought expressed in the second stanza was necessary to the rest of the

poem, and thus the climax in thought properly follows. Viewing the poem thus we cannot escape the full power of its emotion. The love that is eternal and vowed before life began, even though the lovers were not permitted to voice their sentiments to each other on earth, the conviction that this love is the ultimate fact in the evolutions of the worlds, the fine faith superimposed over the knowledge of what futile and unseeing lives men live upon earth:--all of this in the poem arouses us to the inmost. This is poetry of the very first order. Yet as its stands in its original form with seven stanzas, it appears weak and unappealing, merely from its lack of proper unity.

In Confessions, with less of power, we have again much that is weakest and unworthiest in the poet. The poem represents the lover dying unrepentant, glorying in the deception which he has put upon the world in his unworthy love affair. He pictures all of the details of the sordid scene of meeting in defiant triumph of guilt. Such a character and such a picture, indeed such a view of life as the piece gives is not human, is incapable of arousing any universal emotion, is even decidedly questionable. And the language is very plain and unattractive, being mere rhyme with no other claim to poetry:

> "What is the buzzing in my ears?
> 'Now that I come to die
> Do I view the world as a vale of tears?'
> Ah, reverend sir, not I!"

The very words are too light to captivate us, for in the character himself this daring is out of place. Not that defiance of fate and opinion would never seem noble in such an hour, but here it does not. The scene is not true to our convictions regarding life, and therefore cannot arouse our emotions.

A woman's jealousy, especially as keenly and penetratingly presented in The Laboratory is the intensity of emotion itself. She who had loved ardently and had been cast aside apparently for another in the superficial life of the court circles, now finds herself driven, beyond all control of reason into the chemist's shop where she is watching the poison mixed with which she intends to kill her rival by poisoning her drink. The deed of vengeance is to be accomplished while the now-successful one is in her glory, before all of the others at the ball. Yet the jealous one, watching the poison prepared, becomes suddenly fascinated with the colors--"the exquisite blue, sure to taste sweetly", and the "gold oozings"; she gloats upon the poisons and wishes she had the power to use them all for confusion in the world about her. There is just a touch of conscience to make her human, in the question:

"If it hurts her, beside, can it ever hurt me?"

And the last stanza gives us a picture ofher parting from the chemist with the poison in her possession:

"Now, take all my jewels, gorge gold to your fill,
You may kiss me, old man, on my mouth if you will!
But brush this dust off me, lest horror it brings
Ere I know it--next moment I dance at the King's!"

The poem does not lack in emotional appeal, yet it lacks the final touch of genius: insight, the power of the Seer. It has perfect sight and adherence to detail, but for perception of the meaning of it all, it leaves us cold. What did this jealousy mean in human life? Of course, the rival perhaps is poisoned; but what of the love and the lover? What of the futile anger, the life after the deed is done? The scene lacks completeness, relatedness to life as a whole. There is no illumination upon the mystery of this complex human affair. Darkness is not lifted for a moment, except to a slight degree in the words, "Can it ever hurt me?" And if we are to take the picture merely as we see it, the world will find no beauty in it; it never has patience long for narrow jealousies. The horror and pity of it all loses its significance through being incomplete. There is no development in thought, only moral degeneration in character. There is nothing permanent to leave with us. It is simply a human soul theoretically and actually in a laboratory. Such a study is not poetry, in the highest sense of the term.

The character in The Lost Mistress has not suffered by comparison with Tennyson's rejected lover as seen in Locksley Hall. For, above all, it must be said that Browning's rejected suitor is a

Winchester: Some Principles of Literary Criticism
Carlyle: Essay on Burns
Browning: Poems and Plays

gentleman. Here he expresses in parting, his honor at having loved her who now turns him away. The emotion is greatly intensified by his attempt to make small conversation to hide his true feelings.

> "All's over, then: does truth sound bitter
> As one at first believes?"

Here is an honestly brave and gentlemanly attempt to be gracious without being small. And immediately after we have a most human and still braver attempt:

> "Hark, 'tis the sparrows' good-night twitter
> About your cottage eves!"

We can imagine an attempt to be gay, and to laugh, in these words: anything, only that she should not feel his unpleasantness. And so the poem proceeds:

> "And the leaf-buds on the vine are woolly,
> I noticed that today;
> One day more bursts them open fully--
> You know the red turns gray.
>
> "To-morrow we meet the same then, dearest?
> May I take your hand in mine?
> Mere friends are we,--well, friends the merest
> Keep much that I resign."

The emotion is beautifully suppressed, and becomes effective merely because of its restraint, though the lines are poignant with what is not expressed.

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However, we doubt if the subject of a rejected lover can ever be universally powerful as an appeal, as long as the idea of the rejection is allowed to appear at all. For rejected love, is love, is still undying devotion, and such a subject can be properly great only where it falls into expression of devotion alone. The greatest of love poems have been written out of the moment of rejected love, for there, it seems, with the sense of loss, comes a more overwhelming sense of the beauty of what has been lost. And this poem, The Lost Mistress lacks universality in that the lover is not strong enough in his love to lose all consciousness of self in the sure contemplation of the beloved. Properly speaking, then, the poem is not great as a love poem; it is an intimate glimpse into the heart of a lover who feels bitterness but is too much of a gentleman to show it--human, perhaps, but psychological. And from the point quoted the poem drops into a mere expression of sentimentality, with the last two lines saying,

> "I will hold your hand but as long as all may,
> Or so very little longer!"

And so as a whole, the expression lacks power and finish; it lacks unity of idea and ideal, inasmuch as the lover has slipped from true nobility back into foolish consideration for himself. He has been weighed and found wanting in the scale of the world's highest idealism, even of its richest truths.

Probably the poet's supreme achievement in this field of the rejected lover is to be found in The Last Ride Together, which in spite of the delicacy of the theme, and the difficulty of raising it to any sort of masterly treatment, gives us some of the finest power and philosophy in Browning's work. For beauty of thought, for intensity and loveliness of emotion, for perception and fidelity to details in the picture, and for insight into the sigfificance and meaning of the incident to the world in genera, the poem is not in the least lacking. It is truly great. Yet in its construction it lacks essential unity. It is a mixture of the dramatic and the lyric. The first two stanzas are decidedly weak, and far below the emotional peak set by the poem as a whole. They are explanatory and narrative, whereas the lyric stanzas following are in themselves sufficient explanation. The fourth stanza suffers the same fault. It presents unattractive details in an unattractive way:

> "Then we began to ride. My soul
> Smoothed itself out, a long-cramped scroll
> Freshening and fluttering in the wind."

Here not only do we have unnecessary explanation detracting from the unity of the whole, but meaningless comparison. And the utter lack of passion in the words of the first stanza,

"My whole heart rises up to bless
Your name in pride and thankfulness,"

and in those of the second stanza,

"My mistress bent that brow of hers;
Those deep dark eyes where pride demurs
When pity would be softening through,
Fixed me a breathing-while or two,"

take from the power of the work as a whole. Moreover, the third stanza is out of place. The subject lyrically has not been properly introduced until the fifth stanza, with the words,

"Fail I alone, in words and deeds?
Why, all men strive, and who succeeds?"

With this glorious outcry the keynote of the high emotion and beauty of the poem is struck, and from here the poem truly begins; for it is essentially lyric and not dramatic or narrative. Thus, with the close of this fifth stanza,

"I hoped she would love me; here we ride,"

we are prepared for the beautiful emotional picture presented in the present third stanza, beginning,

"Hush! if you saw some western cloud
All billowy-bosomed, over-bowed
By many benedictions...."

Let us, then, rearrange the poem, and see if the situation and moment the poem presents is not perfectly clear, and if the lyrical unity is not more effective.

The lover who has been rejected has asked for one last ride with his loved one; she has consented, and they are on the way together, both silent, conscious of the beauty about them, and of the beat of the horses' hoofs. It is the lover speaks within himself. The significance of the moment has been lifted into the pale of all men's failures and successes.

"Fail I alone, in words and deeds?
Why, all men strive, and who succeeds?
We rode; it seemed my spirit flew,
Saw other regions, cities new,
As the world rushed by on either side.
I thought,--All labor, yet no less
Bear up beneath their unsuccess.
Look at the end of work, contrast
The petty done, the undone vast,
This present of theirs with the hopeful past!
I hoped she would love me; here we ride."

Every word is teeming with emotion and significance; the world's imperfection comes in for its view, the hopes of all that might have been achieved anywhere, the love that seemed to crown all failure and give newness of spirit. But hush! the poet chides himself for even thinking of his failure.

"Hush! if you saw some western cloud
All billowy-bosomed, ever-bowed
By many benedictions--sun's

And moon's and evening-star's at once--
And so, you, looking and loving best,
Conscious grew, your passion drew
Cloud, sunset, moonrise, star-shine too,
Down on you, near and yet more near,
Till flesh must fade for heaven was here!--
Thus leant she and lingered--joy and fear!
Thus lay she a moment on my breast."

Was ever love pictured more beautifully?--the illumination of the moment which draws from the universe at large, the immortal significance of one perfect moment!

And then from this moment of thankfulness, comes the realization of the greatness of what he strove for. Could man ever reach his highest desires?

"What hand and brain went ever paired?
What heart alike conceived and dared?
What act proved all its thought had been?
What will but felt the fleshly screen?
We ride and I see her bosom heave.
There's many a crown for who can reach,
Ten lines, a statesman's life in each!
The flag, stuck on a heap of bones,
A soldier's doing! what atones?
They scratch his name on the Abbey-stones.
My riding is better, by their leave."

We can almost recall the spirit of Shakespeare in some of these lines,

"Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featured like him, like him with friends possessed."

He who can act cannot plan; he who can plan lacks the power of

action. And so some few climb to greatness, to honor and fame, and have their names scratched upon the Abbey-stones. To compare love with all this, and to make it greater, is the highest power of emotion.

But he is driven by the very intensity of his emotion to consider what this fact may mean in his life. Love is to be a reality soon to be withdrawn; what of the work of a poet? What of the trying to write and perfect verses, knowing that in the act of living itself is the true beauty?

> "What does it all mean, poet? Well,
> Your brains beat into rhythm, you tell
> What we felt only; you expressed
> You hold things beautiful the best,
> And place them in rhyme so, side by side.
> 'Tis something, nay 'tis much: but then,
> Have you yourself what's best for men?
> Are you--poor, sick, old ere your time--
> Nearer one whit your own sublime
> Than we who never have turned a rhyme?
> Sing, riding's a joy! For me, I ride."

Browning in these lines seems to be thinking of Keats, and of others of the Romantic age. He is setting himself down as a failure in poetry as in the supposed scene of rejected love. Yet he has gone much further in his lasting philosophy, than Keats in his own reflections upon his ambition. I quote from Keats's Terror of Death, the last few lines.

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"---then on the shore
Of the wide world I stand alone, and think
Till Love and Fame to nothingness do sink."

To Browning, love was an abiding fact; to Keats it vanished with or like fame. To Browning, the signs of immortality were in the act of loving. To Keats, they were to be found brooding over the world as "Huge, cloudy symbols of a high romance." To Browning, it was better to live love than to write it.

And so, after poet, the sculptor and musician merely give an empty idea, a futile imitation of what is real in the world. The rejected lover considers these things, and asks himself what life is; which is better,--truth, or the search for truth; knowledge, or trying vainly to reach knowledge in its finality; until, in the last stanza he puts the question:

"What if heaven be that, fair and strong
At life's best, with our eyes upturned
Whither life's flower is first discerned,
We, fixed so, ever should abide?"

Here is a thought-effect equal to Keats's Ode on a Grecian Urn. The idea of permanence to be found in truth and beauty in a perishing existence, as Keats expressed, has taken hold of Browning's soul. To Keats the idea was to be seen merely upon an Urn, as pictured there, recalling a moment from ancient times; love was still to him a perishing thing, as expressed in the contrast of the real with the pictured love:

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"More happy, happy love,
Forever warm and still to be enjoyed!"

But to Browning, real experienced love, even in its moment of ending, was, by the very height of its experience, not only permanent, but sufficient to transform all of life that should follow, and to translate it in terms of this experience. Heaven was, to the earth-born man, the permanence of his highest experience. The last lines of the poem illustrate this:

"What if we still ride on, we two,
With life forever old, yet new,
Changed not in kind, but in degree,
The instant made eternity,--
And heaven just prove that I and she
Ride, ride together, forever ride?"

That the next to the last line should end with she instead of I merely serves to emphasize the force of his conception: the world is to be viewed in terms of his own experience, and all else added to it from that center.

At first view this philosophy seems abstract and unreal, but when we add to its thought the concrete experience expressed in the second stanza quoted here, (page 25), beginning

"Hush! if you saw some western cloud..",

we feel that the experience is definite and real. Again the sheer obliviousness to all the poet tries to do in life, the apparent failure of the sculptor and musician compared with this haloed

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instant of real happiness--nothing could be more concrete. The very thing which lives in the sculptor's art is the inspiration back of it, and the world is more interested in that than in the art itself.

> "And you, great sculptor--so you gave
> A score of years to Art, her slave,
> And that's your Venus, whence we turn
> To yonder girl that fords the burn!
> You acquiesce, and shall I repine?"

The fact that the sculptor can be satisfied with his art, knowing at best how fickle judgment will be likely to ignore it, knowing it is not real, and affords him no happiness in itself--I say this fact can be answered only by the direct, over-powering emotional idea back of the poem, that the experience of love which called forth the art was in itself the clue to happiness, the key to acquiescence, the vision of heaven which satisfied.

And so with the musician:

> "What, man of music, you grown gray
> With notes and nothing else to say,
> Is this your sole praise from a friend,
> 'Greatly his opera's strains intend,
> But in music we know how fashions end!'
> I gave my youth; but we ride, in fine."

The speaker in the poem here has just lived the inspiration and the reality which makes him one with the musician and poet and sculptor. Their fame is merely a high testimony of the heavenliness of the experience which he is now living.

In the next to the last stanza, we have packed the human soul's instinctive worship of beauty, and its ever turning to the highest form of it, it can find; also, the most human and poetic conception of life's inability to achieve perfection in this world, although coming marvellously near it (a thought which Keats immortalized in his Ode to the Nightingale); and lastly, the thought that though life would have been willing to forego heaven for such earthly happiness, heaven must dim the luster of the earthly and claim its ultimate justice; for only through gleams of such absolute perfection on earth can the hope of what lies beyond be realized.

> "Who knows what's fit for us? Had fate
> Proposed bliss here should sublimate
> My being--had I signed the bond--
> Still one must lead some life beyond,
> Have a bliss to die with, dim-descried.
> This foot once planted on the goal,
> This glory-garland round my soul,
> Could I descry such? Try and test!
> I sink back shuddering from the quest.
> Earth being so good, would heaven seem best?
> Now heaven and she are beyond this ride."

In the expression of the fourth line, "Still one must lead some life beyond", we are at first tempted to feel moralizing instead of poetry; but these words planted in the heart of the stanza give us the full soul-struggle of the speaker--a struggle which is not only confused as to the issues of life, but which is again an almost-victorious attempt to become reconciled with reality.

The absolute greatness of what he has just missed upon earth is contained in the powerful lines:

> "This glory-garland round my soul,
> Could I descry such?"

The answer is just as moving: he cannot at this moment believe, with the vision of earthly happiness before him, that heaven could far surpass it. "Try and test!"

"Earth being so good, would heaven seem best",

again sounds like moralizing. But is it more? The line, glanced at in terms of what heaven is said to mean in the last stanza--a glimpse of perfection that gives permanent satisfaction in its atmosphere attained---this line means: Would the great lasting vision of beauty and happiness continue to be lasting and a delight forever, <u>if</u> it were allowed to slip into the mere apparent content of the world, and there suffer disillusionment? Viewed in such a manner, the line, entirely consistent with the thought of the last stanza, adds immensely to the value of the poem, and becomes sincerely powerful. Since the definition of heaven, however, comes after it, the line and indeed the whole stanza is misplaced. The stanza which is now last in the poem should be placed before the one which now precedes it. Only so the full meaning of the most powerful line in the poem, and the climax of its thought will be evident: "Earth being so

good, would heaven seem best?"

The last three stanzas, then, going on from the fourth stanza as here rearranged, on page twenty-five, would read as follows:

"And you, great sculptor--so, you gave
A score of years to Art, her slave,
And that's your Venus, whence we turn
To yonder girl that fords the burn!
You acquiesce, and shall I repine?
What, man of music, you grown gray
With notes and nothing else to say,
Is this your sole praise from a friend,
'Greatly his opera's strains intend,
But in music we know how fashions end!'
I gave my youth; but we ride, in fine.

"And yet--she has not spoke so long!
What if heaven be that, fair and strong
At life's best, with our eyes upturned
Whither life's flower is first discerned,
We, fixed so, ever should abide?
What if we still ride on, we two,
With life forever old, yet new,
Changed not in kind, but in degree,
The instant made eternity,--
And heaven just prove that I and she
Ride, ride together, forever ride?

"Who knows what's fit for us? Had fate
Proposed bliss here should sublimate
My being--had I signed the bond--
Still one must lead some life beyond,
Have a bliss to die with, dim-descried.
This foot once planted on the goal,
This glory-garland round my soul,
Could I descry such? Try and test!
I sink back shuddering from the quest.
Earth being so good, would heaven seem best?
Now, heaven and she are beyond this ride."

And here the words <u>beyond this ride</u> refer to earthly as well as to heavenly future.

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Considered in such an arrangement, the above poem is indeed worthy to be immortal. The unity of thought lies in its treatment of the permanence of life's highest values; its unity of impression in the feeling of submission to greater powers that dominate our lives because in that submission we retain an immortality which futilities of earth cannot persuade from us. The feeling is intensified with the constant picturing of the love felt, and most powerful in its moment of losing. Imaginatively, it is filled with quite a complete grasp of the moment's significance from many important standpoints. The language is adequate and as we have pointed out, at times most colorful. But the poem is chiefly great because it sees and presents beauty, without moral intrusion, in a setting of great philosophy. The poem is at all times charged with a single emotion.

The poem Cristina as it appears to us is a most unappealing combination of terrible vagueness, common uninspired lines,--nay, even whole stanzas, entanglements in philosophy that is often abstract and meaningless, and lack of force or imaginative concrete handling. The whole thing is surprisingly lacking in the ordinary essentials of unity and coherence. The rhymes are often forced; ridiculous, unworthy expressions are inserted in a most amazing manner. For instance, take the second stanza:

"What? To fix me thus meant nothing?"

(he is referring to the flirt who pierced his soul with her eyes)

> "But I can't tell (there's my weakness)
> What her look said! No vile cant, sure,
> About 'need to strew the bleakness
> Of some lone shore with its pearl-seed
> That the sea feels'--no 'Strange yearning
> That such souls have, most to lavish
> Where there's chance of least returning.'"

The words "vile cant sure" are not only unpoetic in choice and grouping, but the accented second word of the three gives a very unpleasant effect. The accented word "lone" before "shore" has the same effect; and this is not greatly alleviated if "lone shore" is accepted as a spondee with both words of equal heavy accent. The last line is vague because of the omission of the pronoun "their" before "least". The whole stanza is unemotional; is mere crude thinking out loud. It has a strange mixture of unpoetic images with a few attempts to be poetic, such as in the words "lone shore" and "pearl-seed". The result is completely artificial.

In the stanza that follows this, we have little better in language, and besides this, a whole eight lines devoted to mere moralizing, or abstract philosophy, which in itself is unnecessary, since the whole idea is later expressed concretely. The same fault is coupled with vagueness in the greater part of the sixth stanza:

> "Better ends may be in prospect,
> Deeper blisses (if you choose it),

But this life's end and this love-bliss
Have been lost here. Doubt you whether
This she felt as, looking at me,
Mine and her souls rushed together?"

The stanza is abstract, and merely makes a few uninteresting statements, one of which is repeated several times in the poem. And what an unfortunate and meaningless line it ends with!--

"Mine and her souls rushed together!"

The seventh stanza in the poem is the peak of vagueness reached in it. It is unappealing, vague, abstract.

"O observe! Of course, next moment,
The world's honors, in derision,
Trampled out the light forever:
Never fear but there's provision
Of the devil's to quench knowledge
Lest we walk the earth in rapture!
--Making those who catch God's secret
Just so much more prize their capture!"

What does the poet mean by the expression "to quench knowledge"? What is the meaning of the last two lines, and what is their relation to the rest ofthe stanza? The words "provision", "quench knowledge" and "devil's" are most unappealing. Also, in the last line the stress upon the word "much" by the metrical form is jarring.

In the last stanza, the first and the fifth to the eighth lines inclusive are similarly out of place:

"Such am I; the secret's mine now!"

We are not sure what secret is meant, and the line falls short of conveying any truth even to the mind, to say nothing of to the heart where poetry demands it should convey it. And so with the last four lines of the poem:

"Life will just hold out the proving
Both our powers, alone and blended:
And then, come the next life quickly!
This world's use will have been ended."

The third line of these just quoted is absolutely feelingless. It contains no love of beauty either in this life or the life to come. It does not even express restlessness so much as absent-mindedness.

From the examples given, the poem appears hopelessly unworthy as poetry. And yet, would it not be surprising if we could find in it, or rather in the part of it that is left, one of the very beautiful expressions of Browning's philosophy, and what is still more, of Browning's soul? Let us re-arrange the poem, omit the hopelessly vague stanzas, and add on to stanza five the first two lines of stanza six. The first stanza of the poem is exquisite. But may we not add to it lines two, three, and four of the last stanza? Let us see what the effect will be.

We have the man who has been trifled with in love (no matter

the rest of the story). The flirt did not mean the glance, and so cast him aside. Yet in that glance, he has gained her soul; he has glimpsed in some far pre-existence the belief that they were intended for each other. And if he had missed that glance, and that knowledge and vision, life upon earth would have been futile! So the re-arranged poem will read:

"She should never have looked at me
 If she meant I should not love her!
There are plenty...men, you call such,
 I suppose.... she may discover
All her soul to, if she pleases,
 And yet leave much as she found them:
But I'm not so, and she knew it
 When she fixed me, glancing round them.
She has lost me, I have gained her;
 Her soul's mine: and thus grown perfect,
I shall pass my life's remainder.

"There are flashes struck from midnights,
 There are fire-flames noondays kindle,
Whereby piled-up honors perish,
 Whereby swollen ambitions dwindle,
While just this or that poor impulse,
 Which for once had play unstifled,
Seems the sole work of a life-time
 That away the rest have trifled.

"Doubt you if, in some such moment,
 As she fixed me, she felt clearly,
Ages past the soul existed,
 Here an age 'tis resting merely,
And hence fleets again for ages,
 While the true end, sole and single,
It stops here for is, this love-way,
 With some other soul to mingle?
Else it loses what it lived for,
 And eternally must lose it.
Better ends may be in prospect,
 Deeper blisses (if you choose it)!"

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The last two lines given here, which appeared vague and meaningless with the lines which originally followed them, now have been given a power that emphasizes the emotion of the whole poem, and of the last stanza in particular. She had glanced at him in a moment when she realized the truth of love; and so, far on, in another life perhaps, she will come back to that full realization. She has merely chosen the wrong way this time, though actually in her moment of clear vision she knew better. But it is no matter. She will some other time choose the right way, for in the processes of time and worlds, the right way is finally inescapable. Thus Browning has taken one of the oldest ideas among poets,--the fact that love seems to be ordained in heaven--and has given it unforgettable expression, with true feeling and insight connecting it up with the life that is sometimes inclined to doubt what the poets said. But more than that he has given us a philosophy of eventual right, with this as a concrete example. The example is powerful only because both lovers knew for the one moment of vision that they were eternally intended for each other. But the world stepped in between, and one of them rebelled against the idea. Nevertheless, life which appeared to be thwarted was going only more surely toward its goal.

That this constant wondering at the thwarted plans of the universe was closely laid upon Browning's soul is often evident.

It is one of the most haunting ideas in his poetry. We have seen it in Evelyn Hope, in The Last Ride Together, and in the poem just discussed. Probably there is no more beautiful example of it lyrically than in the Song of Aprile from Paracelsus. The speaker, Aprile, is supposedly Keats. The poet, hearing the call in youth, of his mission, which is to accomplish what other poets had seemed to aim to do, yet had failed to complete, feels that all heaven is made up of such failures who bend down to whisper courage and vision to the living. Yet he, too, fails; the "light that never was on sea or land" has dimmed before him; he approaches death, having left unfulfilled the promise that was in him. A plan in the universe has again been thwarted by human inability to achieve:

"I hear a voice, perchance I heard
Long ago, but all too low,
So that scarce a care it stirred
If the voice were real or no:
I heard it in my youth when first
The waters of my life outburst:
But, now their stream ebbs faint, I hear
That voice still low, but fatal-clear--
As if all poets, God ever meant
Should save the world, and therefore lent
Great gifts to, but who, proud, refused
To do his work, or lightly used
Those gifts, or failed through weak endeavor,
So, mourn cast off by him forever,--
As if these leaned in airy ring
To take me; this the song they sing.

Phelps: Robert Browning: How to Know Him
Browning: Poems and Plays

" 'Lost, lost! yet come,
With our wan troop make thy home.
Come, come! for we
Will not breathe, so much as breathe
Reproach to thee,
Knowing what thou sink'st beneath.
So sank we in those old years,
We who bid thee come! thou last
Who living yet, hast life o'erpast.
And altogether we, thy peers,
Will pardon crave for thee, the last
Whose trial is done, whose lot is cast
With those who watch but work no more,
Who gaze on life but live no more.' "

Here we have the marvellous picture presented of the failure of all great minds most gifted to achieve their highest that was given them to do. The infinite sorrow in the universe as the result of this failure follows:

" 'Yet we trusted thou shouldst speak
The message which our lips, too weak,
Refused to utter,--shouldst redeem
Our fault: such trust, and all a dream!
Yet we chose thee a birthplace
Where the richness ran to flowers:
Couldst not sing one song for grace?
Nor make one blossom man's and ours?' "

The elusive spirit of beauty which Keats followed had never been quite realized. Yet the beauties of England and Italy could not move even his sensitive poetic heart to the final greatness that he needed. And so the lament proceeds from heaven:

"'Must one more recreant to his race
Die with unexerted powers,
And join us, leaving as he found
The world he was to loosen, bound?
Anguish! Ever and forever;
Still beginning, ending never.
Yet, lost and last one, come!
How couldst understand, alas,
What our pale ghosts strove to say,
As their shades did glance and pass
Before thee night and day?
Thou was blind as we were dumb:
Once more, therefore, come, O come!"

The brilliant life, cut off when it most was expected to achieve, is one of the highest examples of this thwarted plan in life as a whole. And, as for the sincerity of the poem, Browning too must have felt his own limitations. The infinite mercy back of the universe was his only solution here--that, and the feeling that no matter how many fail, the hope shall still go on in heaven, the plan shall still be made, that life shall at last--some man shall at last succeed. God builds upon "running sands" in Percy Mackaye's terse phraseology. For here, those who receive the poet who has not completed his task, still look forward, with infinite patience to hope that another shall succeed:

"'How should we clothe, how arm the spirit
Shall next thy post of life inherit--
How guard him from thy speedy ruin?
Tell us of thy sad undoing
Here, where we sit, ever pursuing
Our weary task, ever renewing
Sharp sorrow, far from God who gave
Our powers, and man they could not save!'"

Percy Mackaye: Jeanne D' Arc
Browning: Poems and Plays

Surely the sentiment in this piece is universal. It is written not only to poets but to all of mankind. It is a concrete emotional reminder of the fact that we were placed in this world for something, and of the inevitable sorrow if we fail. It is a glorious incentive held out to mankind. It is a powerful picture, and deserves to rank among the greatest of Browning's works. As a dirge upon the death of Keats, it does not fall far short in power of Shelley's Adonais.

Beside this masterful piece, let us place another fully equal to it, and also from the Songs in Paracelsus: "Over the sea our galleys went." Here we have a more tragic and effective putting of the faithfulness that appears in Wordsworth's Michael. It is indeed Browning's most moving expression of this oft-quoted belief in the success that lies in failure. Its imagery is among the finest to be found in his less pretentious poems. The spirit of adventure permeates the lines. Its unity of mood and impression lies in the emotions of courage and determination living through grief and regret at the moment of vast realization at what might have been. It is a clear portrayal of life. It begins with the hopeful morning of adventure when life sets out upon its voyage,--crudely enough, but with natural powers.

> "Over the sea our galleys went,
> With cleaving prows in order brave
> To a speeding wind and a bounding wave,

A gallant armament:
Each bark built of a forest-tree
Left leafy and rough as first it grew,
And nailed all over the gaping sides,
Within and without, with black-bull hides,
Seethed in fat and suppled in flame,
To bear the playful billows' game:
So, each good ship was rude to see,
Rude and bare to the outward view,
But each upbore a stately tent
Where cedar pales in scented row
Kept out the flakes of the dancing brine,
And an awning drooped the mast below,
In fold on fold of purple fine,
That neither noontide nor starshine
Nor moonlight cold which maketh mad
Might pierce the regal tenement."

In these lines the language is excellent and suggestive: the cleaving prows, and in order brave, the playful billows, flakes of the dancing brine, cedar pales in scented row, stately tent, and regal tenement. And then comes the passage of time, with ever the adventurous joy running through it.

"When the sun dawned, oh, gay and glad
We set the sail and plied the oar;
But when the night-wind blew like breath,
For joy of one day's voyage more,
We sang together on the wide sea,
Like men at peace on a peaceful shore;
Each sail was loosed to the wind so free,
Each helm made sure by the twilight star,
And in a sleep as calm as death,
We the voyagers from afar,
Lay stretched along, each weary crew
In a circle round its wondrous tent
Whence gleamed soft light and curled rich scent,
And with light and perfume, music too:

So the stars wheeled round and the darkness past,
And at morn we started beside the mast,
And still each ship was sailing fast."

The music of the language, the carefully chosen details, the appeal to hearing, sight, smell, feeling, motion, help us to live the experience. But the scene quickly changes. Land is sighted; it is only a bare rock, they see as they draw nearer, and they try to avoid it. But the winds drive them down upon the barren coast, as if fate were ruling their lives. And so they land, still gay and thankful.

"Now, one morn, land appeared--a speck
Dim trembling betwixt sea and sky:
'Avoid it,' cried our pilot, 'check
The shout, restrain the eager eye!'
But the heaving sea was black behind
For many a night and many a day,
And land, though but a rock drew nigh:
So, we broke the cedar pales away,
Let the purple awning flap in the wind,
And a statue bright was on every deck!
We shouted, every man of us,
And steered right into the harbor thus,
With pomp and paean glorious."

And here in the barren rock, submissive to their fates, they build their homes, a "shrine for each."

"A hundred shapes of lucid stone!
All day we built its shrine for each,
A shrine of rock for every one,
Nor paused till in the westering sun
We sat together on the beach
To sing because our work was done."

But grief came when content was ended. Then the human hearts within them had to fight courageously for resignation to the lot that was theirs; for "gentle islanders" came by from the happy isles just at hand"--even the isles which they had perhaps been seeking, and called to them to join them. But these stalwart adventurers had already given themselves to this bare rock, to make it beautiful. Life had made its choice, and could not now start over: for to change or "mar" what was now done would be destructive of life's purposes. And so they cried back that they could not go.

"When lo! what shouts and merry songs,
What laughter all the distance stirs!
A loaded raft with happy throngs
Of gentle islanders!
'Our isles are just at hand,' they cried,
'Like cloudlets faint in even sleeping;
Our temple-gates are opened wide,
Our olive-groves thick shade are keeping
For these majestic forms'--they cried.
Oh, then we awoke with sudden start
From our deep dream, and knew, too late,
How bare the rock, how desolate,
Which had received our precious freight:
Yet we called out--'Depart!
Our gifts once given, must here abide.
Our work is done; we have no heart
To mar our work,' --we cried."

Surely in these lines are combined the music and beauty of language and the images of Coleridge in Kubla Kahn, and the depth and power of theme of Wordsworth in Michael, and the powerful

emotional effect which is characteristic of Keats. A whole tragedy could scarcely take our breath away more than the great tragic realization thrust upon us in the last lines of this poem. And yet as we view the poem as a whole, we realize that that same emotion underlies the whole; that it is being led up to in the final expression of it.

Of other songs from Paracelsus, we have in the expression of grief, beginning "Heap cassia, sandal-buds and stripes" almost as unified and powerful a treatment, with remarkable choice of language and no less singleness of mood. This song is further remarkable for its poetic theme: the fact that a spirit of a greater beauty seems to cling as a fragrance to all that was, and now is gone. Such wealth is fitting to deck a grave. Poets have not gone much beyond this in thought,--at least in thought which is emotionally conceived.. Almost every phrase recalls a fragrance that clings in the air.

"Heap cassia, sandal-buds, and stripes
 Of labdanum, and aloe-balls,
Smeared with dull nard an Indian wipes
 From out her hair: such balsam falls
 Down sea-side mountain pedestals
From tree-tops where tired winds are fain.
Spent with the vast and howling main,
To treasure half their island-gain.

"And strew faint sweetness from some old
 Egyptian's fine worm-eaten shroud
Which breaks to dust when once unrolled;
 Or shredded perfume, like a cloud
 From closet long to quiet vowed,
With mothed and dropping arras hung,
Mouldering her lute and books among.
As when a queen, long dead, was young."

Browning: Poems and Plays

But to pass for the present from dirges and the philosophic love poems, let us consider examples from another wide field of this poet's work--his expressions in the field of patriotism. The three Cavalier Tunes have gained a certain popularity because of their rugged language and their undaunted spirit. They are held up to the youth of the day as representing the epitome of courage and loyalty in the face of great odds. Undoubtedly they do carry a spirit in them which is easily caught, and for that reason are to be admired. But of these three poems, the first lacks unity, in that the first stanza is descriptive and the stanzas following compose the song of the loyalists. And although the gruff strong spirit of brave men is carried along through every word, with powerful hatred, the piece partakes largely of the element of boasting to keep up courage. The result is not beautiful, although thrilling. The language, furthermore, though evidently strong and fitting for such an occasion, is not poetically conceived, inasmuch as it purports to be the actual words gentlemen would use under such circumstances. Hence the best that can be said for it is that it is a powerful character picture, of interest historically, and perhaps to be read for an occasional thrill. It is charged with emotion, though it has little basis in thought.

The third of these so-called Tunes, again pictures the nobles cantering at dawn to rescue the castle held by a woman, the wife

of one of those in the party. It is remarkable for its rhythmical imitation of the horses' canter, and for its contagious spirit of courage. But it is rather a study in musical effect and overdone enthusiasm for an incident. If the selection is to be judged as poetry, it should be classed either among war songs as such, or in the realm of character or merriment songs. And it is hardly universal enough in sentiment to belong to either. It gives merely a one-sided picture, just as the first song, without general human interest. It belongs to a class rather than to mankind. And in that respect perhaps we might venture to say that it is not true to life as a whole. Also, we might add that neither of the two poems is filled with genuine emotion so much as boasting. They are overdone.

The second of the Cavalier Tunes, or Drinking Song, however, has more claim than either of the others to the title of poetry. It is decidedly dramatic. It is charged with tense emotion. It represents by its very situation the tragic power, the enraged grief, the stern bravery in the midst of experienced danger. The fight has gone against them. The speaker's own son has been killed during the engagement, and has died laughing bravely while Cromwell's troops shot him down. Furthermore, there is a pathetic touch in the line "Who found me in wine you drank once?" For the stern leader in the midst of his reasoning is suddenly recalled to the fact that the king had once toasted his health in their presence,--

an act unusual, and therefore remarkable. He recalls the incident with as great pride as he remarks of the death of his son. He is perfectly sure that his duty is to his King, who has given him house and lands and money, even though those titles and gifts long since have vanished. There is fury, almost unexcelled, both in his questions and in the great hoarse answering shout of the troopers about him.

"Who gave me the goods that went since?
Who raised me the house that sank once?
Who helped me to gold I spent since?
Who found me in wine you drank once?

"King Charles, and who'll do him right now?
King Charles, and who's ripe for fight now?
Give a rouse: here's in hell's despite now,
King Charles!

"To whom used by boy George quaff else,
By the old fool's side that begot him?
For whom did he cheer and laugh else,
While Noll's damned troopers shot him?

"King Charles, and who'll do him right now?
King Charles, and who's ripe for fight now?
Give a rouse: here's in hell's despite now,
King Charles!"

Essentially, this selection contains a sound view of life,--at least of life in an imperfect world where wars continue to be necessary. It does not present blind patriotism nor egoism nor perverted truth. There is in the very depths of its feeling the consciousness that a cause of which the speaker is inherently a

part is in danger of falling. All in that nobleman's life and his complete view of history from the standpoint of his followers is urged upon him in payment of an obligation which is social and moral--to him. Gratitude, grief, amazement, and determination battle in his heart. He gives us in himself one of the powerful portraits of the staunch, old-time aristocrat. He is, in spite of the narrowness of that position, a true patriot and a fine example to the world. And long after the war spirit shall have died out of the world--if that time may ever come--, he deserves to stand as a symbol of a man's responsibility to society and the world at large. For certainly our views of that responsibility grow from class to the greater world in general.

Yet as poetry, this piece is limited. If we are to consider it in the light of a Drinking Song, with all of its dramatic setting it should rank very high. But the poet, the seer, who is concerned with beauty and insight into the meanings of life's tragedies, cannot continue to give us one side of a question and find a general reading public. A far greater and more human theme is to be found in the futility of war, and not in the tragic theme of humanity braving that futility, unless the tragedy of it all is more clearly emphasized.

With the subject of patriotism in Browning we call to mind his many dramatic monologues dealing with that question. And we are faced with a problem of great importance: Whether these may properly

be considered as lyric or dramatic pieces. The Lost Leader, with all of its dramatic setting, ought to fall into the realm of the lyric, for it is really the speech of the New Leader to his bewildered followers, giving in its earnest plea no story, but merely recalling to them the treachery of their former leader and attempting to picture to them the full significance of that act. The situation is tense with drama and feeling, and not a little philosophy. For when the crowd, which is unreasoning, sees the leader it has given its money and worship and honor, and even faith to, suddenly desert, its members are bound to become confused and to lose faith in their cause. Hence scorn is heaped upon the old leader, and explanation that in time he too will see his wrong. Appeal is made to the names of the leaders of Democracy, or in its cause. Very effective is this appeal, and very exact in its discrimination:

> "Shakespeare was of us, Milton was for us,
> Burns, Shelley, were with us,--they watch from their graves!
> He alone breaks from the van and the freemen,
> --He alone sinks to the rear and the slaves!"

Browning later admitted reluctantly that Wordsworth had been the model for the poem, in his change to royal sympathies, yet, adding at the same time that the poem was rather to be considered a picture of any traitor than as a portrait of the great Wordsworth, whom he admired. From this fact the poem raises a question of sincerity, or else of true value; for without the model for which

Phelps: Robert Browning: How to Know Him
Browning: Poems and Plays

it was intended originally, it loses the significance of its powerful appeal to the names of other poets; and to take away the significance of appeal to those names, the force is largely gone. It indeed gives a highly emotional picture, yet it is founded on situation rather than on thought, except as emphasizing the baseness and dishonor of treachery, and the honor and necessity of courage and responsible action. The one thought in the poem that is outstanding is the forgiveness that they must mete out in heaven to their Lost Leader, who has merely been confused and misunderstood the consequences. Considered beyond these facts as poetry, the whole piece is lacking in any unified impression of beauty; its language is unpicturesque and unimaginative; its view of life is scornful rather than impressive. It is realistic and tragic, and ends with a tense emotional idealism, yet it lacks breadth of sympathy, it does not present a universal understanding of its subject. It is an artificial rather than a wholesome treatment of life, and there are few lines in it which we would wish to remember as poetry.

Far greater is the marvellous and picturesque treatment given us in The Patriot, in which we have the opposite picture presented--the man who remains faithful to his cause, while the crowd turns against him. To begin with, this is a subject which at any time would captivate readers. It is one of the essentially great themes that

there are in the world. Scarcely a generation passes without some reminder of its essential truth. And as to construction, the unity in it is excellent in that the whole scene is viewed by the Patriot himself in his moment of defeat--the hour a year before when he had trodden those same streets with the whole world seemingly unable to honor him enough, and the present hour when those who are not ashamed to be seen are waiting for him at the scaffold. The emotional situation is perfect: It is raining, his wrists are bound together; stones are being hurled at him as he passes along; and now his forehead, struck by one of these missiles, is bleeding. In the midst of this humiliation, the hour of triumph stands out clearly in his mind:

> "It was roses, roses, all the way,
> With myrtle mixed in my path like mad:
> The house-roofs seemed to heave and sway,
> The church-spires flamed, such flags they had,
> A year ago on this very day."

This is lyric intensity of a very high order: not a word in these lines fails to emphasize in a powerful manner the meaning of that experience as it is now viewed by the man marching to his doom. The crowd had then loved him, and their love had seemed marvellous. They would have given him the very sun in heaven, had he asked it,--so it had seemed. Yet he knew they had been playing a part, and he hates them for it. Bitterness cannot be kept out of

his words:

> "The air broke into a mist with bells,
> The old walls rocked with the crowd and cries.
> Had I said, 'Good folk, mere noise repels--
> But give me your sun from yonder skies!'
> They had answered, 'And afterward, what else?'"

But the bitterness almost imperceptibly changes into regret and grief: he had ventured his life for the impossible; such a sacrifice could only come to grief, for in such a way the crowd has always treated its heroes. The Patriot lifts his heart in an anguished appeal to God:

> "Alack, it was I who leaped at the sun
> To give it my loving friends to keep!
> Naught man could do, have I left undone:
> And you see my harvest, what I reap
> This very day, now a year is run."

At this point the full personality of the author begins to shine through the Patriot's words, in half-pity, half-satire against the conscience-stricken mob. Beneath it all lies the question, will heroes long continue to exist, if they are so treated in general?

> "There's nobody on the house-tops now--
> Just a palsied few at the windows set;
> For the best of the sight is, all allow,
> At the Shambles' Gate--or, better yet,
> By the very scaffold's foot, I trow."

With slight gradation the regret and grief have become pity for the crowd that has gone out of its way to torture him:

> "I go in the rain, and, more than needs,
> A rope cuts both my wrists behind;
> And I think, by the feel, my forehead bleeds,
> For they fling, whoever has a mind,
> Stones at me for my year's misdeeds."

And with a high, natural climax to the feelings of the Patriot, as he draws nearer the scaffold and with true bravery cannot die with bitterness in his heart toward those who have wronged him, we have the conscious and hasty attempt of a man trying to console himself, trying to convince himself that he has been right, trying to prepare his mind to meet his Maker. In his words, Browning has given us with burning lyric music a universal philosophy of a plan in the universe that can take account of failure in men's lives. Men have gone on to eternity drunk with vanity, missing the idea of true glory, and disillusioned as to true living. They have died in their success; they have been paid upon earth; what humility toward God can live in their hearts? The Patriot is satisfied now that he has done his best and cannot be reprimanded in heaven, which he feels surely lies ahead of him. He has not been carried away, defeated, undermined by glory. Having given all and been unpaid, he is ready to meet his Maker. It is even "safer so".

"Thus I entered, and thus I go!
In triumphs, people have dropped down dead.
'Paid by the world, what dost thou owe
Me?'--God might question; now instead,
'Tis God shall repay: I am safer so."

No-one can fail to feel the power, the color, the intensity of the lines in this poem. It is the very music of emotion, and the emotion has a solid basis in thought. The single impression that lives with us is a very real pity for the Patriot, for the crowd, for all who fail. As to whether the conclusion in the poem is sheer optimism and one-sided philosophy or not, we have only to refer to the long list of martyrs and heroes in real life who could not have remained true to their causes had it not been for such a belief. The words are not primarily philosophy; they are genuine belief gained from keen observation of life. They represent not only the situation given, but they may apply almost universally to us all in that they are an emphasized form of the promise of youth and the too-often disillusionment of later life; and in that they touch a universal chord of a certain appearance of injustice in this world and compensation which ought to be received in another.

Such poems of Browning have been called by the rather loose term of Dramatic Lyrics. But we are of the opinion that all lyrics, sprung from deep and true emotion are largely dramatic, in that they represent a conflict in spirit, as Keats's Ode on a Grecian

Urn and Ode to a Nightingale, and Wordsworth's Ode on the Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood; or that which is wished for, in contrast with the reality, as in Shelley's Ode to the West Wind, or Burns's To a Mouse. If they cannot with all of their dramatic quality attain the finesse of either dramatic or lyric poetry in itself, they are not to rank long with the finest of those forms. The Patriot, from all that has been said about it, truly attains the stamp of the genuine lyric: the Lost Leader does not fully. Of other poems of this type more will be said later. But the general classifications of Dramatic Lyrics, Dramatic Romances, Dramatic Idyls, and Dramatis Personae must be broken down, and the poems judged on their values as lyrics, or else by the more loose term of dramatic poetry, if we are to arrive at any sort of appraisal of Browning's work.

Of other poems in the field of patriotism, Pheidippides, Herve Riel, The Italian in England, and Home Thoughts from the Sea ought to be mentioned. The first three are dramatic in form. Yet the same standards of poetry should apply for excellence in short dramatic poems as apply to the lyric. The poetry of Keats is not essentially different as to our liking of it, as it appears in the Romance of The Eve of St. Agnes, and in the longer dramatic form of Endymion, or in the brief lyrical drama, La Belle Dame Sans Merci. The style of Milton is to be found in Paradise Lost as surely in his

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Lycidas or Sonnet on His Blindness. In the three dramatic poems of Browning above mentioned, we do not find the same characteristics of style or greatness as appear in others of his poems. The same will apply in general to his dramatic poems with two notable exceptions, Saul, and Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came. The chief fault is that they lack the personality of the author; they do not contain lines which in themselves are beautiful, but all is of value only because of, and from the standpoint of the story. Nearly all contain excellent dramatic observations of human nature in unusual situations, greatly emphasizing character, but such a characteristic belongs to the novel or the drama rather than to the realm of poetry. We are undoubtedly moved by the patriotism of Pheidippides, who, forced to conceive some way of arousing the Athenians to fight, cleverly brings them the symbol or promise of the god--a flower, which he is aware grows plentifully at Marathon where the invaders must be met. We are interested vitally in the picture of the Spartan chiefs who smile behind his back, thinking to deceive him with their hatred. Yet the language in which this story is told is vague and cumbersome, and for the greater part rough and unmusical. It contains no phrases which would deserve to be classed as gems in the language, as Irving in his Mutability of Literature would have us believe poetry must be. It lacks art and workmanship. It is neither the natural language

of conversation nor the art that would improve upon nature. We must confess that we are moved by the picture, and by the poem at large. But we are moved by the facts of the story, rather than by the way of telling it. And sheer power, even if the poem were said to be powerful, is not sufficient without mood and lasting quality which comes through artistic rendering.

More regular in its language and perhaps more powerful in its appeal is the poem Herve Riel. There are emotional bits in this story which are not easy to forget:--the Admiral who was great enough to relinquish his place for the honor of France, the poor Breton Sailor who was brave enough to speak as he believed, and skilled enough in his confidence to do what no-one else present would have attempted, and simple enough at the end to ask no reward save leave to go and see his wife. There are lines in the poem which are emotionally remarkable, such as the following:

> "So, the storm subsides to calm:
> They see the green trees wave
> On the heights o'erlooking Greve.
> Hearts that bled are stanched with balm."

And again, in the same stanza:

> "How hope succeeds despair on each Captain's countenance!
> Out burst all with one accord,
> 'This is Paradise for Hell!
> Let France, let France's King

Thank the man that did the thing!'
What a shout, and all one word,
'Herve Riel!'"

Undoubtedly this deserves to rank as great literature, for its emotional quality, for its insight into the very hearts of men at a great dramatic moment, for its deep underlying fundamental observations upon the world's tendency to forget its heroes, and the sound idealism in the picture of a deed as its own reward. Yet for any mood except hero-worship, for any language that inspires association, or arouses the personality in us, we doubt if it can be ranked with such great examples as Coleridge's Rime of the Ancient Mariner, whose mood cuts deeply into the heart, and whose language sings itself over and over in our ears, or with Arnold's Sohrab and Rustum, whose very restraint accomplishes more than Browning's enthusiasm, or Keats's Eve of St. Agnes, whose delicate and sensitive beauty long outlives the story it tells.

More impressive than either of these dramatic pieces of Browning's just mentioned, is The Italian in England, because it is more regular and musical in its form, uses simpler and more restrained language, and appeals more universally to more chords in the human heart. To begin with, it is charged with a single deep emotion of ardent love, which beautifies the whole story. The element of patriotism is softened by the human story; there is not any shouting, nor propaganda. We are allowed to think quietly in our

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own hearts and to see the brave girl who proved the hunted patriot's friend: to live the scene through with all of its meaning, and to understand its significance in the life of the man who was saved. Patriotism, idealism, love, fidelity, courage, the sense of the passage of time and events, length of life, and human regret all are blended under the tense love-theme in the poem. Perhaps the single fault of the poem is a certain lack of unity in structure. The love element is introduced too late in the poem. The significance of the details at the beginning is not soon enough made clear. Undoubtedly some of these details at the beginning might be well omitted. But except for this fault the story ranks with other tales that are beautiful in poetry.

Among other narratives in Browning, The Pied Piper of Hamelin, and The Statue and the Bust are perhaps better known than those we have discussed. The Statue and the Bust is filled with powerful emotion, the sense of futility which overwhelms the poet in contemplation of the scene described. The language is indeed carried into our hearts; we live the scene again. We see the Duke riding past

"in his idle way.
Empty and fine like a swordless sheath."

We see the exchange of glances between the Duke and the lady who is about to be married to another; we understand the vows made

in secret in their own hearts; we understand how life passes by and time changes their lives but ever preserves the love and the hope in each. And suddenly, life has grown old for both, and yet each lives in the dream of youth. Certainly the story is told in unforgettable language. Here is all of the power of poetry, with a fault at the end. Moralizing and didacticism is admittedly ruinous to poetry; and here the moral is tacked on and emphasized. The poem without the moral, or with even the merest suggestion of the author's opinion would have been a masterpiece. But when we analyze the moral, we find it to be rather heartless in its general meaning and application, besides being offensive to the poetry it concludes. Essentially Browning is not concerned with what is right or wrong in desire; but he does lay down the principle that if one is foolish enough to desire to do what is wrong, he is cowardly for not carrying through his desire to accomplishment. We have only to turn to Shakespeare's Macbeth to see where such a principle would lead us. Lady Macbeth believed the same, and drove her husband on to murder his King and guest, simply because he desired to be King. We cannot feel that such a rule could be laid down with any success for universal conduct, for were there no conquering of desires, poetry and society would be impossible.

The Pied Piper of Hamelin, in spite of its unattractive

lines, its mixture of humor and pathos, which tends to destroy the emotional impression of the poem, is so humanly appealing in its story that we tend to excuse many of its faults. The underlying picture of the unkept bargain and the punishment is deeply impressive, and the idealistic theme of the charm of music is even more so. Could the poem have been presented in the mood of the latter half of it, beginning with stanza Twelve,

> "Once more he stept into the street,
> And to his lips again
> Laid his long pipe of smooth straight cane,
> And ere he blew three notes (such sweet
> Soft notes as yet musician's cunning
> Never gave the enraptured air)....."

and the moral at the end have been omitted, we doubt if a more effective dramatic piece could be found. To be sure the language is neither imaginative nor colorful, but it is music in itself, and from stanza twelve on, it is suggestive and powerful. However, the total effect of the poem is lost by the humor of the first part. Also there are before that stanza, and in the moral at the end, many forced rhymes and unnatural words.

Browning's supreme work in the field of narrative poetry is to be found in Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came and in Saul. These two poems represent the full spirit of the man, the best of his power as a writer, and, in fact all which, from the viewpoint of great poetry, we should expect to see expressed. Each

of these poems contains a complete view of life: each presses into a single mood all of the compact emotions which give the soul to poetry; each is distinct in style and colorful in language; and each is based upon a dramatic situation which transcends the ordinary problems of life, and is both universal and important. Furthermore each contains a theme which is of vital importance to the world in general.

In Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came, the mood is one of mystery and horror and darkness. In this setting we have the picture of one who, no matter how many before him have failed, finds that success in the very darkest hour is to be found by merely keeping on. That so many should try, and that we should ask ourselves if it is possible for mere man to succeed in his quest, is the urge that makes this work fascinating. Browning believed that it is possible for man to succeed. He went further than this, and showed that success is simple; that it depends on earnestness of soul, and on unwillingness to be deceived or frightened by all that may be thrown in our paths. Darkness is blackest near the goal. The shame and pity lies in the realization of all who have failed before us as we set out. Browning has struck one of the deepest chords of the human heart when he declares at the end of the last stanza:

"I saw them and I knew them all. And yet
Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set,
And blew, '*Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came*.'"

In spite of the last darkness, which was disillusionment at sight of the goal itself, the hero went on. Here is the Poet's answer to the doubt expressed in *Aprile's Song* from *Paracelsus*, and its philosophy is decidedly more wholesome than the theorists of fates and futilities would have us believe.

For stanza form, music and simplicity of language, alliteration; for use of the supernatural, suggestiveness of words and lines, we are in touch, we feel, with the very heart of Browning, when conscious of his power and his art he attempts to speak in his most appealing language. Yet there is no beauty here; there is instead, sense of space, of nature's reflection of mood, of invisible powers of evil before which man despairs. Beauty is be contrast in the nobility of the human will which apparently thwarted at every turn still moves on in triumph. For example of this effect, let us take the first stanza:

"My first thought was, he lied in every word,
That hoary cripple with malicious eye
Askance to watch the working of his lie
On mine, and mouth scarce able to afford
Suppression of the glee that pursed and scored
Its edge at one more victim gained thereby."

The poem *Saul*, though classed as a Dramatic Lyric is properly

a narrative poem. We can conceive that it might easily be objected to upon two grounds: first, that it is religious; and second, that its style is unwieldy, and cumbersome. The religious nature of its subject gives it valid claim to such a theme, and does not in our opinion prevent its being judged as great poetry, if the theme is handled on a universal and broad scale. Such broadness, it is to be asserted, will appear in the dual nature of its subject, for in music and the life of the spirit is to be found its chief appeal. Music, in the heart of a youth such as David, vibrates through many types and forms to the despairing mind of King Saul like life itself, until courage is reawakened. And when the harp becomes stilled, the soul of the youth sings on through his eager speech, answering the darkest unasked questions in the soul of the listener. Nature is kindled at the theme; a sense of the Divine Spirit moves over the sunrise, as over the stars at night. Man is in tune with the Infinite through the music and love which Nature had planted in his heart. And by its ecstatic glow, it is seen that there is no death, and that nature, God, and man are given a mutual understanding, each to each, in the Christian ideal, whose need for existence, not yet understood by the world, is glimpsed by David. No touch of didacticism or of moralizing intrudes upon us. Saul is inspired to live, through the music and love and belief of David; David is lifted by his love into

a communion with nature which is visibly permeated with light and a spirit of understanding equivalent to his own.

This chord of universal love that fills the poem makes it the more remarkable and significant when we consider how generally lacking in love are Browning's poems. By love we do not mean love toward God, for, indeed in that, Browning seems to excel; but we mean rather love toward men. According to the old Commandment it is written: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Browning had no love for Porphyria in Porphyria's Lover, or for the deserting Lost Leader, or for the characters in The Laboratory. There are no adjectives which leave us room to pity them; we are simply swept on into a fascinating study of people in situations--cold, unsympathetic, almost harsh. The spirit that animates the Cavalier Tunes is that which rather inspires hatred among peoples, than love. In The Lost Mistress, there is affected generosity. Evelyn Hope is as much an extreme in the sentiment of silent admiration, as The Statue and the Bust is the other extreme of criticism of those who remained silent in their admiration. Yet this spirit of love for men, which was painted as a reality in Aprile Sings, of the Songs from Paracelsus; which dawned in a feeling of what great artists must have gone through in experience, in The Last Ride Together;

Matthew: 22

which breaks through into grief at the harsh things the world does, in The Patriot; and which is pictured as gaining credence in the human heart, in An Epistle of Karshish---this spirit of love is actually and keenly felt in Saul. And it is not any one-sided, narrow, humanitarian theory or fascination. It is a spirit of clear interpretation of the things that the world lacks; of the ideals that it has sought for and that have carried it far. It is the experiencing of the fundamental commandment which upholds society at large. Despair yields before it; life and the world are swept with a meaning. Here, certainly, is the true Browning.

Majesty has been pressed into the style of the poem, through its singular and difficult form, as used in English. It actually sings itself majestically:

> "Then fancies grew rife
> Which had come long ago on the pasture, when round me the sheep
> Fed in silence--above, the one eagle wheeled slow as in sleep;
> And I lay in my hollow and mused on the world that might lie
> 'Neath his ken..."

Browning's lyrics are easily divisible into two classes in general: pure lyrics, with emphasis on music and feeling; and the philosophical lyrics, whose feeling ranges into great thought and perplexing problems. For instance, Evelyn Hope

would fall in the realm of the pure lyric, and The Last Ride Together in the realm of the philosophical lyric. Cristina and The Patriot also would belong to the latter class. In each of these fields, Browning has done some excellent work.

Although In a Gondola, which is a dramatic dialogue in lyrics, would tend largely to be composed of the purer musical lyrics, we find the two elements of music and philosophy rather powerfully blended, always emphasizing the musical rather than the thought which springs from feeling. This collection is uniformly excellent, with but few exceptions to mar it as a whole. The latter part of the second is sensual; the fourth lacks the nobility and spontaneity of true poetic feeling (I refer to the song, The Moth's Kiss First). The others are genuinely remarkable poetry. In them we find such ideas, emotionally treated as the contrast of the false world of appearances before true love and running time; the mystery of life beautifully expressed in the question of what we are--as people see us, as we imagine, and as sacred individuals; reference to the quest of life, in

> "O which were best, to roam or rest?
> The land's lap or the water's breast?"

There is also the questioning of what death is, more than

destruction to thing; the representation of the ideal fading into the human; the environment which takes its spirit from the one it shelters.

From Pippa Passes we find many fine examples of the true lyric. The first twelve lines of the poem, picturing the coming of day have a lyric fervor and form of great power. In fact, for sheer poetry, this is one lyric which the whole world--critics and all--might enjoy, for there is no intrusion in it of any questionable problems. Of the two songs of Pippa in the earlier part of the play, "All service ranks the same with God", and The year's at the spring", the world has found much to object to in the lines, "God's puppets, best and worst, are we" (in the former), and

> "God's in his heaven--
> All's right with the world"

in the latter. Memory of the latter quotation is said to have stirred a great deal of the modern spirit in one of the great English novelists. The feeling that the words represented the belief of an age, that they went to the extreme in religious piety and fervor, and therefore on the grounds of sincerity could not be admitted as poetry, has long continued to exist.

The first apparently denies the freedom of the will in man. Such a denial would meet with rigid objections from the

modern Humanist, and the modern ultra-Realist would substitute many materialistic conceptions for the word "God" in it. The second expression quoted, from the second poem, would arouse even more objection from the materialistic conception which has gained ground with the Realists that the world can take care of itself, and from the Humanistic battle against extremes, one of which is to be found in revealed religion. We are to presume that the conclusion stated in neither poem is logical.

Both selections are decidedly Romantic in quality, and the point at issue seems to be, if they are to be considered as poetry, whether the conclusions reached in either have a logical basis in the emotions of the poet. The emotional reaction that "All service ranks the same with God", seems to be one of the tragic facts of life, consistent with the universal poetic outcry against fame. It represents one of the noblest conceptions of life and of a sympathetic society which we have attained. It is a conception embedded in most religious conceptions of any character, although one of the least observed beliefs in general. And if we are to accept such a fact, the emotion at least, is justified in going further to the conception of the Power which brings vast acts into seeming futilities. One of Shakespeare's most beautiful lines, even when removed from its context in the play Hamlet is "There's a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew

Foerster: Humanism and America
Browning: Poems and Plays
Shakespeare: Hamlet

them how we will." Man may fret and fret himself into the belief of freedom of the will; indeed such a conception is absolutely essential to a right-thinking society. And yet there are limits at which the will must turn back and reveal its own helplessness. At such a point the emotion begins, which is here expressed: "We are God's puppets". Besides, there are other lines in the poem which reveal a mysticism similar in many ways to that expressed in some of the excellent poetry of William Blake, and in fact, in much of the poetry of the leading Romanticists. We have only to refer to Wordsworth's poetry in general, and to Keats's lines on The Mermaid Tavern.

But, it will be objected, these lines of Browning's are abstract. When removed from their context they indeed appear to be so--mere philosophical observations. Yet they are charged with emotion in a moment of intense vision in the midst of life's tragic possibilities. What they lack, to the unimaginative reader, is perhaps an emotional setting of tragic import, such as the expression above, quoted from Hamlet, has been given.

It appears that a poet may describe all that God means to us, in his poetry, and be considered a great poet, but the moment he mentions the name of God, he is considered as treading on the very questionable grounds of didacticism. However, there are moments in every life, certainly, when such expressions as Browning has

given us in these two poems are not obtrusive; and it is to such of the highest moments in human experience that Browning appeals. Poets are acclaimed for doubts and human weaknesses expressed in their poems, yet when they show genuine convictions that are untrammelled by human experience, then human patriots feel that they are no longer able to sympathize with them. In that sense, poetry which is said to try to teach is put aside for that which clearly moves the emotions. Yet great poetry is generally held to be that which uplifts the spirit of man.

However, in the second stanza of the first poem mentioned here, we have in the last lines, the one great weakness of the poem:

> "Untwine me from the mass
> Of deeds which make up life, one deed
> <u>Power shall fall short in</u>.."

This is plainly didacticism, and very questionable philosophy, in its appearance, seeming not to take into account human failure. Yet inherently it emphasizes the human will which seems to be denied in the first stanza. Man has power to achieve; wherein he fails, the fault lies entirely in him. Of course the process of life may have weakened him, yet the ideal of what the world intended him to be is held out. He was originally given power to meet any situation he might be confronted with in life. I call these lines a weakness because they have the appearance of didacticism. However, in essence, they are as great as the rest of the

poem.

Let us quote the second poem alluded to, in its entirety:

"The year's at the spring
And day's at the morn;
Morning's at seven;
The hill-side's dew-pearled;
The lark's on the wing:
The snail's on the thorn:
God's in his heaven---
All's right with the world."

These words are equivalent in intensity of the emotion expressed to Shakespeare's

"Hark, hark! the lark
At heaven's gate sings!..."

or to Wordsworth's lines beginning:

"My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky..."

They represent a conviction logically planted on the emotions aroused by what is seen. To be sure, the lark merely draws near to the heaven which men look up to, (in Shakespeare's poem) and the heart merely overflows with awe at a representation of God's glory (in Wordsworth's poem). However, the same emotion and the same belief underlie all three, although the moods are different. Shakespeare's lines represent joy, in the daring of the lark; Wordsworth's represent awe; Browning's represent love. The poem

Shakespeare: Cymbeline
Palgrave: The Golden Treasury
Browning: Pippa Passes

of Browning's is one of the finest of the pure lyrics in Browning's work.

In the second scene of Pippa Passes, we find an excellent bit of twelve lines in Phene's words, beginning, "Through the valley of love I went", which deserves to be called a true lyric; and the song of Pippa, "Give her but a least excuse to love me", which is a supreme triumph in emotion, contrasting the true voice of love with the concrete picture that the world hears the true voice of love, but ever turns aside without heeding. And in the last scene of the same play, we have these delightfully memorable lines,--the spirit of poetry itself, with their fancy, their music, their mingled wonderings about life:

> "The bee with his comb,
> The mouse at her dray,
> The grub in his tomb
> Wile winter away;
> But the fire-fly and hedge-shrew and lob-worm, I pray,
> How fare they?
> Ha,ha, thanks for your counsel, my Zanze!
> 'Feast upon lampreys, quaff Breganze'--
> The summer of life so easy to spend,
> And care for tomorrow so soon put away!
> But winter hastens at summer's end,
> And fire-fly, hedge-shrew,lob-worm, pray
> How fare they?
> No bidding me then to...what did Zanze say?"

These lines contain a complete view of life, and a single emotional impression. Furthermore, they reveal a universal love, and a love for nature and lower forms of life which stamps

them as remarkable. They are not the mere words of a child, as they seem at first, from their context, to imply. They might as well have been spoken by the poet himself in one of his most charming moods.

Of other pure, or musical lyrics in Browning, the ballad Rosny, with its sublime note of grief at what war is; the Prologue to the Two Poets of Croisic, with its brief lyrical expression of the glory with which love illumines the common world; My Star, with its emphasis of the same thought as the poem preceding; Never the Time and the Place, with its pathetic picture of the mind's power; Wanting is What, with its very poetic conception of hope which lies in the very unfilled dearth of life; Misconceptions, with its beautiful picture of love which is lost, or rejected, yet lives in the heart; the Prologue to La Saisiaz, with its beautiful warning to the soul to keep its vision of "Skyblue and Spring", in the moment when death intrudes upon the sight; Memorabilia, with its beautiful tribute to Shelley,--all of these attain the finest excellence in mood, thought, uniformity, and musical expression. The Poetics, ("So say the foolish") is an emotional straining after truth, yet contains a satirical treatment of blind emotionalism, at the same time emphasizing itself, much the same sort of, although far greater sentiment. The Epilogue to Asolando is over-idealistic,

tending to conceit, and lacking the true elements of human love and sympathy. Summum Bonum is also somewhat over-done sentiment, easily bordering upon pure sentimentality. It lacks fineness of perception, and humility. One cannot dismiss the universe as small even in comparison with the love of one girl; nor is it convincing to say that the universe means that to one person. The poem tends to be mere abstract philosophy, although containing very beautiful sentiment. One Way of Love, again, is a picture of the rejected lover, with, indeed, a pathetic portrayal of an attempt to be happy in what is lost, but it emphasizes the personal rather than the universal in feeling and thought. Hence, it becomes more of a study in human experience than a poetic appeal.

We find Browning's briefer lyrics of love generally lacking the simplicity and power of such poems as Jonson's Drink to Me only with Thine Eyes, and Burns's John Anderson, My Jo, or Mary in Heaven; perhaps, because to him who experienced a happy love and romance in this world, grief in love, or disappointment or vision of the ideal which might have been would have been hard to express. For contrast with the sentiment in Summum Bonum, we have only to recall Shelley's powerful Dream of the Unknown, wherein the mortal was so overcome with the wonders of Paradise that in wondering whom to present the flowers to that he had gathered, he cried out "O! to whom?" suddenly finding anyone in the world

Shelley's Complete Works
Browning: Poems and Plays

unworthy to receive them, or glimpsing a love so much greater that the earthly love paled beside it. In general, then, the fault with Browning's poems of this type is, depth of emotion with which to gain a full vision of life and the universe as a whole is lacking, or is not carried through the whole piece. As a final example of this type, the poem Appearances is one of the weakest. Such terms as "so bright, so fair" indicate the lack of adequate language to express emotion.

Not, however, in the pure lyric, but in the philosophical or thought lyric is Browning's chief power evident. While such of the former as Misconceptions, Rosny, My Star, and Never the Time and the Place, attain universality and power--and the last-mentioned, in spite of an unpardonable grammatical construction, "I and she", in an emphatic place---, it is Love in a Life, Life in a Love, and such brilliant masterpieces of the thought type of lyric to which we turn for the true Browning. Not even in Keats or Shelley has there been a more impressive presentation of life's seeking its ideal beauty in vain,--ever coming near to it, only to feel it vanish--, than in Browning's Love in a Life. The mood is that of one crying out in the midst of life's disillusionment that he cannot be wrong; that though the house seems deserted, and night comes on, there is so much unexplored and unknown, it would be folly to despair. What

Browning has added to the picture is the faith and courage of man. Life in a Love is less impressive because it lacks the unifying figure of the former, although its emotion is greater, striving to express the madness and restlessness which follow one who has actually seen his idea.

At this point a distinction should be made between the thought lyric and the merely realistic character picture. Abt Vogler, Rabbi Ben Ezra, Andrea Del Sarto, and Pictor Ignotus, each might be said to represent the true lyric form, from their compact, unified thought, singleness of impression, and emotional emphasis. These will be dealt with separately later. However, such interesting character pictures as Cleon, The Bishop Orders his Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church, Fra Lippo Lippi, An Epistle of Karshish, Johannes Agricola, Master Hughes of Saxe-Gotha, Caliban Upon Setebos, A Death in the Desert, Development, Apparent Failure,--all of these rather belong to the extreme of Realism, having as their object the imitation of reality more than the poet's impression. With varying degrees they violate the structural principle of unity in mood or impression, necessary to poetry. Fra Lippo Lippi, while remarkable in philosophy and emotional suggestiveness, is very weak in its rambling narrative contained within the lyric form, losing a great deal of power as a result. Master Hughes of Saxe-Gotha represents great emotion in its picture, without actually

conveying or expressing it. Also as a further fault, it has vagueness and harshness of both language and figure. The Bishop Orders His Tomb at Saint Praxed's Church, and An Epistle of Karshish represent very well the extreme of Reality, or Realism, which has been noted to mark these poems in general. For their finer qualities they deserve a more careful treatment than con be given them here. However, dismissing the realistic character pictures in general as lacking emotional power, insight, unity of mood or impression, when compared with the other finer lyric forms, so near them in type, we will examine some of the latter for their excellences. We do not mean to imply that these poems hurriedly mentioned and dismissed are not interesting, nor that they do not contain great parts of valuable thought, but chiefly that they belong too much to the intellectual and too little to the emotional; too largely to the merely interesting and realistic, and too little to the vital and moving reaction toward life which can be universalized in the soul of the reader.

Of those more truly poetic pictures, then, which with mere settings in the realm of realism, grasp a universal theme and lift the human spirit at large into a general breathing cummunication with life and the vital powers of feeling, Abt Vogler is one of the finest. Here in the words of a musician, who for the moment becomes poet and human being as well, is a questioning of life

similar in effect to Keats's Ode on a Grecian Urn. Not permanence before a perishing existence, as Keats has tried to express, but frailty of music, before the permanence of other arts in comparison--hence the frailty of an art, before the permanence of existence, is Browning's theme. Both Keats's and Browning's poems present the emotionally-conceived fact that truth is beautiful and that truth is permanent; that beauty, which is the emotional understanding of truth, is therefore imperishable; --to Keats, because of the evidence of a beauty which has lasted materially for close upon three thousand years; to Browning, because of the evidence of the highest of beauties which perishes, even out of memory quite, yet leaves the mind and soul quivering with the glory which it was, having been merely withdrawn instead of perishing. Indeed, the permanence of art before the sight, as contrasted with the impermanence of the art in sound, is as moving a conception to the thought, in Browning's poem, as the permanence of art to the sight as contrasted with the impermanence of experience, as in Keats's poem.

But, to consider first the emotional setting which gives this work of Browning's its unity and force, a musician, Abt Vogler, has been extemporizing upon his instrument, and, having become engrossed completely in the beauty of the harmony which he has produced, through a certain logical development, has risen spiritually to the heights of perfect rapture and content, through the

beauty of the sound entirely; yet, when called suddenly from the realm of fancy to the very real desire to reproduce his music,--to recall and repeat, or perhaps to write it down, simply because it had had such a powerful effect on him at the moment,--he is baffled, lost, before one of the greatest mysteries of existence. He cannot recall the music, because of the limitations of his mind, or, perhaps more exactly, of his memory. No other mortal has heard the music. Yet the whole reality of what he has heard still vibrates through his entire being. If some other had heard, and especially some one with sufficient power of memory and musical gift, the whole might be brought back and written down: might have been recalled from the tense silence where it must be still vibrating. Therefore, the music is no more dead than if it had been heard and might still be reproduced. For certain it is that God, who gave sound and hearing as mediums of beauty, heard the whole of the lost music, and could from the mysterious folds of His universe, reproduce it at any moment.

Or again, if the magic of soul which moved the musician to express his highest in music, had been expressed in painting, or in writing, it might have achieved permanence and lasting fame before the world, because the world could have reproduced it. But now, because the glory was not seized and cast into a form of earthly permanence, it must be said never to have existed, at

all, as far as men are concerned. To the musician, still beating with the evidence of his theme, this is inconceivable. The whole music is so real to him that, were it not for his human limitations, he could recall it back out of the silence, where to him it exists as really as the artist's work exists upon canvas, or the writer's upon the page. Simply because he expressed in sound exactly the same inspiration which another would have expressed in color, is not sufficient reason why the one work should be said to be real and the other to be unreal or non-existent. And so it is through this burning passion of regret in the midst of rapture that the musician comes to the conclusion, "There shall never be one lost good."

Also, there is nothing impersonal or detached, or merely psychological about the poetic figure at the heart of the picture. The personality of the poet is as real here as in any of his work; is as vital emotionally, and as universally appealing, from the magnitude of his subject and the concrete expressiveness of its handling, as in any of his work,--more so than is such an abstract work as <u>One Word More</u>, where intensity of sincerity loses its power through too great fantasy, and through unnatural comparisons.

The whole power of the emotion is struck in the first lines, and even in the very first word:

"Would that the structure brave, the manifold music I build,
Bidding my organ obey, calling its keys to their work....
.....
Should rush into sight at once..."

And again, it is carried with full force into the second stanza:

"Would it might tarry like his, the beautiful building of mine,
This which my keys in a crowd pressed and importuned to raise!"

The whole poem is intense and powerful in its feeling. The remarkable arrangement of words for emphasizing the emotional values of words and ideas, as well as their musical accents, increases the power of the poem, in spite of the fact that the meter used is difficult in English.

"In sight?/ Not half!/ for it seemed/, it was certain, to match/man's birth,/
Nature/ in turn/ conceived/,obeying an im/pulse as I;/
And the em/ulous heaven/ yearned down/, made effort to reach/ the earth,/
As the earth/ had done/ her best,/ in my pas/sion, to scale/ the sky:/ ----"

In almost any line this same powerful metrical and emotional effect may be found:

"Not a point norpeak, but found.....";

"Presenc/es plain/ in the place,/ fresh from/ the Pro/to-plast..";/

"Or else/ the won/derful Dead/ who have passed/ through the bod/y and gone,/
But were back/ once more/ to breathe/ in an old/ world worth/ their new/:
What nev/er had been,/ was now;/ what was,/ as/ it shall be anon;/"

Or take the following as an example:

"....Think,/ had I paint/ed the whole,/
Why, there/ it had stood/, to see,/ nor the pro/cess so won/der-worth:/
Had I writ/ten the same,/ made verse/-still, effect/ proceeds from cause,/
Ye know/ why the forms/ are fair,/ ye hear/ how the tale is told;
It is all/ triu/mphant art,/ but art/ in obe/dience to laws,/
Painter/ and po/et are proud/ in the art/ist-list/ enrolled:/---

"But here/ is the fin/ger of God,/ a flash/ of the wi/ll/ that can,/
Exist/ent behind/ all laws,/ that made/ them and, lo,/ they are!/
And/ I know not,/ if, save/ in this,/ such gift/ be allow/ed to man,/
That out/ of three sounds/ he frame,/ not a fourth/ sound, but/ a star./"

And again, as to the beauty of the thought, such expressions as the following cling to us with haunting force: "There shall never be one lost good;" "All we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good shall exist;" "The passion that left the ground to lose itself in the sky...music sent up to God;" "I stand on alien ground, surveying awhile the heights I rolled from into the deep."

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The emotional and musical qualities in this poem, together with its power of thought, carried into the heart, and sufficient concreteness to carry its philosophy to both mind and heart, make it one of Browning's completest and most finished pieces in style.

A companion piece to it, expressing the musician's re-interpretation of an old masterpiece, from the written score,--and thereby re-expressing, or re-kindling the same beauty of old, all of whose attendant circumstances had long ago perished,--is to be found in A Toccata of Galuppi's. This poem contains a predominating emotion in the sense of melancholy and despair at the futilities of earthly joys. However, it is more limited to the personality of the character who is interpreting the music, and becomes more of a character study than the other, with less universality. Also, it lacks the power and fire of passion, and is slightly more technical in its terms. Its unity is less than that of Abt Vogler, in that there is during the poem a change, or development of the musician's understanding of the music being interpreted. As dealing with the subject of life through the person of a musician, it stands between the relatively high art of Abt Vogler, and the rather extreme realism of Master Hughes of Saxe-Gotha.

Andrea Del Sarto ("called 'The Faultless Painter'") deserves to stand with Abt Vogler in the completeness and force of poetical expression which it gives. It differs from Fra Lippo Lippi, not in

the intensity of emotion (although, perhaps in its refinement), but rather in the unbroken singleness of mood to be found in its united pictures of twilight, of genius still dwelling in the light of its youthful possibilities, though now nearly past the hour of achievement; of gray thought between the heaven reached for and the earth grasped: of sorrow at realization that the love for which he had sacrificed his art was nothing to him except an idle worship of an ideal. Here, the story included within the poem is entirely subdued before the emotional plea, being at no time more than incidental to it. The character picture, in itself a perfect bit of Realism, is remarkably presented only in the details that affect the mood of the piece; and the character of the painter is so universally infused with an emotion common to mankind, that the whole picture is lifted out of the realm of mere interest, to the realm of true feeling and vital concern. The emotional mood of the poem is expressed in the lines,

> "A common grayness silvers everything,--
> All in a twilight, you and I alike.."

The intellectual basis for this emotion is expressed in the theme:

"Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
Or what's a heaven for?"

Pictor Ignotus (or The Unknown Painter) is similarly effective as a piece. The speaker in this poem attains universal proportions in that he refused to sacrifice his talent to material standards of success. The greatness of emotion in the poem is achieved at the start by the overwhelming despair put upon him at realization of what the world's fame and the world's subjects in art might have meant to him. The passion is increased with the realization that with a talent fully equal to that of the world's most honored, he might so easily have had fame and wealth of the rarest sort. Yet the true emotion of the poem has no despair in it. It is a sublime and peaceful reconciliation of the spirit to the ideal still claimed as the result of the despair hung over him. The beautiful emotional power is well conveyed in the lines that close the poem:

"They moulder on the damp wall's travertine,
'Mid echoes the light footstep never woke.
So, die my pictures! surely, gently die!
O youth, men praise so,--holds their praise its worth?
Blown harshly, keeps the trump its golden cry?
Tastes sweet the water with such specks of earth?"

The intellectual force of the poem is perhaps best expressed in the line:

"At least no merchant traffics in my heart."

Just as Abt Vogler is supreme in its expression of faith in the "never one lost good"; and Saul in its conviction of the love pervading the entire universe; The Last Ride Together, in its realization of the common inspiration which transcends the arts which it produces; so Pictor Ignotus is a modest triumph of the philosophy of idealism as mankind's highest point reached on the pathway to perfection. Just as Saul is the most beautiful, and Abt Vogler the most powerful and brilliant of Browning's works, so Pictor Ignotus is the most human. We might add to these works, "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came as the finest exemplification of mood, and as emotionally the most stirring. To those sheer beauties of emotion as expressed in Misconceptions, and in Day, from Pippa Passes, we might add some lines from The Boy and the Angel.

We are sorry to observe that this last-mentioned poem as a whole is confusing, that it lacks unity in its point of view. Most of the story as told in the first part of the poem is unnecessary and less effective than the simply-stated actions in the latter part. The poem does not properly begin until the lines,

"God said, 'A praise is in mine ear;
There is no doubt in it, no fear:

So sing old worlds, and so
New worlds that from my footstool go.
Clearer loves sound other ways:
I miss my little human praise.'

"Then forth sprang Gabriel's wings, off fell
The flesh disguise, remained the cell.
'Twas Easter Day: he flew to Rome,
And paused above Saint Peter's dome.
In the tiring-room close by
The great outer gallery,
With holy vestments dight,
Stood the new Pope, Theocrite:
And all his past career
Came back upon him clear,
Since when, a boy, he plied his trade...."

Here the facts of the story as related at great length in the first part, now appear effectively, without repetition, and from the standpoint of better unity, since the poem begins with the most important incident, or occasion, which called it forth. Likewise, the poem should close with the lines of the Angel,

"'Go back and praise again
The early way, while I remain.
With that weak voice of our disdain,
Take up creation's pausing strain.
Back to the cell and poor employ:
Resume the craftsman and the boy!'"

for with these lines, the whole beauty of the story ends. The moral tacked on in story-form after them, detracts from the central emotion and loveliness of the poem. Furthermore, it is vaguely expressed:

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"Theocrite grew old at home;
A new Pope dwelt in Peter's dome.
One vanished as the other died:
They sought God side by side."

What happened either to the boy or the angel later in life is not important to the poem. God was displeased with the voice He heard, because it had in it no fear; Gabriel carried word to earth that praise to God from a humble place would sound better in heaven. The boy went back to his humble place:--these facts constitute all that is necessary to the single emotion of the poem. They are the poem, and all else added to them detracts from the total effect.

Yet certainly among these finest of Browning's works, there are at least four others which deserve to be mentioned: Fears and Scruples, Rabbi Ben Ezra, Prospice, and the Prologue to Asolando. Of these, perhaps Prospice will always remain best loved for the supreme courage it expresses in the face of death's tragic reality. The man who could utter those words was no mere sentimentalist, no blind egotist, no propagandist of beauty's ways: he had climbed the mountain, faced the storm, knew the "Arch-Fear". And the message that he left to the world was burning with conviction. The sincerity, the essential truth, the sheer emotion of fearlessness, the power of its picture of the overwhelming odds, the willingness to face the whole truth, and, added to these things, the

blunt language of emotion, which by its very brief yet strong phraseology seems the timing of the resolute steps of the adventurer: these factors shall make it more and more a poem among poems as time goes on. Such qualities make the author of the poem, to us, "like..the heroes of old". I cannot believe that any poem in Browning's works surpasses this in emotional power.

The Prologue to Asolando is the answer of a philosopher, in very beautiful poetry, to the mysticism in life's passing experiences, or, perhaps, more specifically, to such an experience as the disillusionment pictured in Wordsworth's Ode on the Intimations of Immortality. In thought it has much in common with Wordsworth's Ode, though it is less of a complete philosoph of life. Much of its power is lost through a slight vein of scorn which invades certain of the stanzas, and through incoherent, incomplete expressions. Such faults appear most objectionably in the sixth stanza.

Rabbi Ben Ezra is probably the poem which Browning himself would have considered his most complete attempt at anything like a full philosophy of life, and perhaps the most distinctive among his works. It resembles, certainly, least of all his works, great accepted philosophies or works that had gone before him. It begins with a sheer force of optimism which is overwhelming in its evident sincerity. It finds its emotional background in the conception

that age coming on is not to be feared nor regretted, since it expresses the fulfillment of a plan; hence, perfection, which lies only in completeness, lights the way to another life and world where standards must be obviously those of the aspiration, not the achievement, of this. There is a completeness of the part, or single day, and the completeness of the whole, which is God's plan for us, in full. So it is that the things that make us in reality unhappiest--the doubts of youth, the endings of days, the material failures and emptinesses, the hurts and pains and struggles,--are, after all, the guide-posts to our ultimate happinesses. The day finished gives a standard of measurement. The doubt felt gives a higher consciousness of perfection beyond. The material failure in the midst of honest achievement, reassures us of a completeness of measurement thus far lacked and lacking. The pains and struggles are eventually the true ways to final appreciation at the end. The mere going on through incompleteness shows a plan back of life. The plan shows a greater Hand--that of God--shaping our lives. Evidence of such a fact should allow no place for grief or fear, beyond the moment's demand. The whole pattern is of a perfection measured in standards of the things we desired (since the desire is the very beginning of the great deeds later). The whole plan is of conscious attainment and of attainable ultimate joy. This is not mere

baseless optimism. It is a reasoning of the heart, from wonders already observed in life, to conclusions consistent with the finest that has ever been said regarding human problems. The experience and belief of the world, at its finest, tend to support what the poet says. It is even evident that Browning avoids narrow, doctrinal statements at every point. He is discussing at all times a language of the heart which has never been expressed clearly by the language of the mind. He is no more at sea in his philosophy, and no less poetic than Wordsworth in his Ode on Intimations of Immortality, or than the original conception in Plato of Wordsworth's idea,--as far as thought is concerned, at least.

The language of Browning's Rabbi Ben Ezra is difficult, though not vague, as often believed. With its short piercing sentences, and its stanza form in general, it is filled with genuine emotion, and never just wandering in intellectual mists. It has a towering singleness of emotional impression and mood, struck in the very first lines of the poem--a great confident challenge to the doubt expressed in the eyes of youth, from one who has looked long and earnestly ahead into the shadows of age and death, and turns back with an overwhelming conviction of beauty there rather than the slightest suspicion of poverty or despair or emptiness there:--

"Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
The last of life for which the first was made."

The poem would lose all of its power, if as a mere character picture it had not so completely merged the personality of the poet with the speaker in the poem, that one could forget the fictitious title and listen to Browning's own words. The high strain of emotion is never once lost throughout the poem, until at the end we listen to the seeming benediction, ourselves. For here, at the very end, is the poet's simple, prayerful confession of his own weakness and frailty. We do not find this any form of over-confidence, nor of over-optimism which generally rests upon over-confidence. The courage required for one advancing in years, and facing life squarely, to utter the opening lines of the poem, after knowing the disillusionments beyond by those seen and experienced already, must have been remarkable. Also, the piece is everywhere saved from mere sentiment or optimism by its substantial basis in thought. The powerful emotion, and the evidence of human faith attained only through struggle save the tone of the work from being didactic. Its occasional moralistic or abstract tendency is saved by the familiar language of life, by concrete examples and figures interwoven, and by the emotional power and daring of the thought. As examples of the

finer powers of imagery and music in the work, we might take such a line as the following:

> "Irks care the crop-full bird? Frets doubt the maw-crammed beast?"

or, the following:

> "Rather I prize the doubt
> Low kinds exist without,
> Finished and finite clods untroubled by a spark."

Fears and Scruples, another of Browning's forceful poems, is unfortunate in its title. It appears to be a piece of religious didacticism. This impression is increased by its title. However, although it is also to be regarded as dangerously near realism in its character picture, it has many chief elements of really great poetry. For an emotional occasion, we might suggest the final taunt heaped upon the religious believer who has made a sad failure of life. Perhaps The Worm Turns might be a fitting title for the poem. However, the emotion of the poem has in it no bitterness at the taunt, no criticism of the justice of God, but a sincere, overwhelming love, a revelation of the life-struggle of the speaker. The poem is really a parable of God's love expressed in the Scriptures, with all the doubts of men hurled against it, given in a moment of supreme revelation and hope, to

a bitter critic and unbeliever. The simplicity of the idealism in the poem is shown in its thought-basis: God moves in mysterious ways; Life's ideal of God has given it immeasurable greatness; in such a vision was the only possible joy. There is through the whole poem a startling feeling of the vastness and mystery, and grandeur of God, and of the beauty in truth which overpowers all lesser motives and opinions. From the first words in the poem, where the vastness of the emotion takes shape, "Here's my case. Of old I used to love him"---to the last stanza, we feel the masterliness and confidence in the mind of the speaker, as guided by his tense emotion he beats down his listener into silence, with mere words. And at the end we feel, with the speaker; we do not object, or moralize.

> "Why, that makes your friend a monster!' say you:
> 'Had his house no window? At first nod,
> Would you not have hailed him?' Hush, I pray you!
> What if this friend happened to be--God?"

Certainly such an effect should be the final test of whether poetry is poetry or mere didacticism. Although the poem undoubtedly has taken into consideration a great deal of thought and theology, it does not try to teach; it tries to give a feeling conception of what it is that lies back of the unperturbed belief of many saints and even mortal failures. It is a conviction of

Browning's own. It does teach, but it first moves, and all teaching comes through the emotion. It is one of the few poems in Browning's works where many emotions of a very human sort come violently into conflict and all resolve themselves into the single dominating love of beauty at the end.

Love Among the Ruins has the same power and the same completeness just mentioned. Its mood is very nearly perfect. The only weakness in the poem is that it attempts to moralize, in the last stanza, throughout to the last words: "Love is best." Yet we doubt if such a fault, not at all intrusive, is objectionable in such a truly great poem. The emotional powers, the unity--love, waiting among the ruins of the heart of civilization's once greatest; the comparison between the fame that was and the love that is; the realization that no part of the scene of past magnificence is of human interest longer, except the love it held---make the poem supremely appealing as poetry.

Aside from a tendency to mere Realism, with thought underlying it, Browning has other general faults. He lapses into near-satire, and unpoetical and unfeeling language, as in The Grammarian's Funeral, and in House. Often his works are of unequal values in their various parts. For example of this we would quote, or

mention, the Epilogue to Fifine at the Fair, which is a very beaufiful and remarkable poem on death, if considered by the first and third stanzas only. However, the utter sensationalism, and the unpoetic thoughts stand out only if the second and fourth stanzas are admitted to this consideration. There are evident attempts to moralize, in his works, as in The Twins; absolute inability to cope with a great theme when the moralizing tendency gets the upper hand, as in The Light Woman. Also many of his works are not properly unified. Perhaps the most irregular and unfused single poem upon a great theme with any pretensions to great treatment, yet completely lacking, is The Heretic's Tragedy. However, the world will as time goes on eliminate the faulty work and come to love that which expresses the true artist in him.

Undoubtedly such a tentative treatment of Browning's poems as this type of study must prove to be, cannot hope to accomplish any sort of justice to its subject. What is praiseworthy will with time win the admiration which it deserves in the hearts of its readers. Our fear is that through those bits of workmanship not thoroughly refined, much that is of value to thought and feeling may be lost to popularity. Browning does uncover deep undercurrents of the heart in his people that appear, though those same characters savor too much of the didactic or the theatrical;

they are too much cut from certain patterns, such as of patriotism, hatreds and jealousies, rejected loves, whimsicalities, and dogmatisms. The result is too often that of intellectual stimulation and interest rather than the desired effect of sincerity in strong poetic form. The true test of greatness is that through these characteristics which we have called faults, elements of great truths, flashes of powers never fully expressed live on and revive a true fascination for the truly great human personality back of them. One who triumphed over life as Browning did, who lived in its strength and not in its weakness, who rebelled against the sham and painted truths of his own day, must always in some measure be dear to the world. The wholesome, sincere message of his faith and optimism was supremely triumphant over all faults, and is conveyed with original power from his pages.

Indeed, it is quite apparent that where the poet most sought to teach, his subtlety led him to express great lessons by emphasizing wrongs, aiming at mistruths, in the hope that we would be wise enough to find the truths that they represent. Those truths are seldom the obvious, as we found, for instance in The Statue and the Bust. Interest, science, and our poor worldly wisdom should not be too hasty in discarding those types, truths, and earnest convictions of such an intellectual and moral force. Could a more apparent equality of powers have stamped all of his works, or could

time or genius have permitted him to place the works he has given us, in a more universal human setting, so that the obvious and not the unusual might have been impressed upon us, we should certainly feel the presence of a literary Titan. Study and thought will increase our high opinion of him as a man and of his often colossal views of this life and world. Poetic greatness, with these as a background, cannot fail to be attached to those parts of his work that ennoble our spirits with admiration and hope.

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